Rifle empty, he clubbed it to beat off the bloodthirsty, snarling beasts.
CHAPTER I.
BOUND FOR THE BIG WOODS.

"I've got a gal in Mackinaw,
The purest gal you ever saw;
She wept and cried when I had to go,
And she says, she, Do come back, Joe—
Come back to me when the loggers come;
If you save your cash and quit the rum
I'll hitch with you," she says, says she;
"I'll stick by you if you'll stick by me."

"So, boys, I'm on a reg'lar spree—
A reg'lar spree,
A reg'lar spree,
A howling, roaring, wild old jamboree."

A husky, unshaven young man carried the air. He had a powerful baritone voice. He was perched on the back of one of the car seats and surrounded by a packed mass of rough-and-ready customers. In that gathering there were Yankees, Irishmen, French Canadians, Norwegians, and more than one who appeared, by his coarse black hair, swarthy complexion, and high cheek bones, to have Indian blood in his veins. They were dressed in rough woolens, but the most of them were in their stocking feet, for there was a law which prevented the wearing of calked boots upon a railroad train. Their kits and outfits choked the aisle of the car.

These men were laborers bound for the Great North Woods of the Upper Peninsula.

"All together, boys!" shouted the singer, waving his arms. "Bear down hard, now!"

And, to a man, they united and roared forth the chorus:

"So, boys, I'm on a reg'lar spree—
A reg'lar spree,
A reg'lar spree,
A howling, roaring, wild old jamboree."

Their voices drowned every other sound. The rumbling of the car wheels could not be heard. The panting of the laboring locomotive was smothered. The car rocked and reeled drunkenly over the wretched roadbed.

Nearly all of these men had been drinking. Even now more than one bottle was going round.

The singer struck into the second verse:

"She's a fine old gal, her name is Sal;
As a wife she'd make a ripping pal.
I'll quit the woods and settle down,
I'll buy a little house in town,
I'll git a job to keep me home,
No more in the Big North Woods I'll roam;
I'll have some chicks around my knee,
And I'll raise a handsome familee."

NEW YORK, December 25, 1909.
And now, without being invited or urged, the crowd joined in the chorus:

“So, boys, I’m on a reg’ler spree—
A reg’ler spree,
A reg’ler spree,
A howling, roaring, wild old jamboree.”

On a seat at the rear end of the car sat two clean-shaven, clear-eyed young men, who were watching this scene with more or less interest. To one of them it was a novelty beyond question. That one was Dick Merriwell, who now turned to his companion, Ned Bryce, and observed:

“If those men keep it up at this rate, there will be many of them laid out before they reach the camps.”

“Their supply of liquor is running low now,” said Bryce. “It is impossible to prevent them from taking the stuff along, and so the quicker they drink it up the better it will be for everybody.”

“Do they always go into the woods in this fashion?”

“Yes, as a rule they have a last final grand blow-out on their way to the camps. They know what’s ahead of them. From the time they arrive at the cutting grounds until they get out to the towns in the spring there will be no more liquor to drink, and it will be a case of hustle from daylight till dark. I hardly fancied you’d care to make the trip up here with me when I proposed it, but I’m mighty glad you came along. You can see that I would have found rather poor company with this bunch.”

“You hint that we might get a little hunting up in the big woods—might possibly be able to shoot a bear or two—was a big inducement,” smiled Dick. “I’m glad you gave me the invitation, Bryce. I’ll remember this journey a long time, especially the final stages of it. I’ve got an idea what a crew of Michigan loggers is like. They look as if they could whip their weight in wildcats.”

“Oh, they’re fighters, the most of them,” nodded the lumberman’s son. “I’ve been surprised that they’ve got along as peacefully as they have up to this point. As a rule there’s something like a dozen fights before the men reach the camps, and sometimes a whole crew gets into a general head-punching mix-up. But those are the sort of men we require up in the timber. It wouldn’t be any place for weaklings.”

“They’re like animals, the most of them. They’re men with the bark on, sure enough.”

“But there are good men among them, just the same,” nodded Bryce. “You’re seeing the worst side of them now.”

“But you’re afraid to trust them yourself, Ned. You told me you were worried for fear old King Kirby would try to get this crew away from you.”

“You can see for yourself, Merriwell, that these men are scarcely responsible in their present condition. When sober the most of them are square and reliable, but drink makes the ordinary human being irresponsible. Kirby stole two-thirds of our last crew. He laid for them and carried them off when they were loaded and in no condition to realize whether they were falling into the hands of one of my father’s bosses or an emissary from the enemy’s camp. By the time they sobered up and realized where they were Kirby had them on his own territory, and it was too late to back out.”

“After you caught this man Kirby at his crooked tricks up this way I was inclined to fancy you wouldn’t have any more trouble with him.”

“Oh, he’s got nerve and cheek!” exclaimed Ned. “Besides, he has a pull with the courts. That’s how he got hold of the territory on the west side of the Floodwood. My father had first claim to that section, and legally he should have held it; but Kirby’s lawyers pretended to find some flaw in the papers, and a bribed court backed him up. Now it’s a fight for the Floodwood when the spring rise comes, for the one who gets his logs down the river first will have every advantage. For a short time the Floodwood is a wild, roaring, raging torrent, but it subsides quickly, and any delay in running the logs means that a great deal of timber will be left high and dry to lay over until another year. That’s why my father is sending up big crews to rush the cutting and get the logs to the river.”

“Seems to me there’s liable to be a tremendous mess when the drives are on, Bryce.”

“I’m afraid there will be, Merriwell. My old man has got the fight of his life on his hands. It wouldn’t surprise me if a regular lumberman’s war came out of this rotten, crooked, unjust court decision.”

The region through which the train was passing was wild and barren, with desolate-looking stretches of brush, and stumps, and dead “slashings.” The snow lay heavy upon the ground, but even where it was deepest the stumps sometimes thrust themselves above its surface, betraying the fact that there had been criminal negligence in the method of timber cutting, which had left in most cases the best part of the tree—sometimes fully eight feet of it—standing to rot. There were scattered broadcast hosts of decaying tops which would have yielded good logs. Observ-
ing these tangled, barren stretches, Dick wondered at the greed of man and the folly and rascality of law-makers who would permit such frightfully ruinous waste. He wondered that politicians with power and influence could be found who dared to fight the forestry commission that was seeking to preserve the timber lands of the country. Graft!—that was the word which kept ringing again and again in his mind as he saw the fearful evidences on every hand.

The door of the car opened, and a huge, square-shouldered man appeared, glanced around, located young Bryce, and approached.

"How's she going in here, Mr. Bryce?" he shouted, while the crew roared loudly over another wild song.

"Are the boys getting along peaceful?"

This was Ben Britt, the crew boss.

"They're doing pretty well so far, Britt," answered Ned. "They seem to be good-natured."

"Well, then they're doing better than the bunch in the other car. I just had to put a head on Big Mike Hagan. He was trying to stir up a general rumpus, and he'd started a riot when I sailed into him. He'll have a couple of black eyes. I thought mebbe there might be something doing in here, so I just dropped in. How far are you going?"

"Through to Grindstone."

"What for?" asked the crew boss. "I thought you was coming up here to hunt, and so I s'posed you'd drop off at Shingletown. There won't be much game round Grindstone with the crews going out of there for the last two weeks. They've howled every bit of game out of the woods for twenty mile around. Take my advice and make it Shingletown. There ought to be shooting thereabouts."

"I've got a notion to see the crew through, Britt."

"If I call'ate you know I can take care of this bunch," growled the boss resentfully.

"You ought to, but it wouldn't surprise me if you had some trouble. I'm half expecting old Kirby will try some more of his tricks."

"He'd better not!" roared Britt. "I ain't afraid of him nor any of his gang. Don't you worry, he can't git none of my men. Anyhow, if he tried it I don't call'ate you could do much to stop him, Mr. Bryce, and you might git into trouble yourself. I judge Kirby'd like to git a crack at your father's son. It would do him good to send you back home on a stretcher."

The face of Ned Bryce flushed.

"I hope you're not trying to frighten me, Britt," he exclaimed. "There never was a Bryce yet who was afraid of a Kirby. Besides, I've got some important papers to deliver to Robbins, the foreman of Camp Three. My father sent word for Robbins to meet me at Grindstone."

"Well, he needn't 'a' done that. I could 'a' took the papers to Robbins. Kinder seems like the old man didn't trust me, Mr. Bryce. I'd like to show him that I can be trusted. You give me them papers and I'll see that Hod Robbins gets them, all right."

But the youth shook his head.

"My father gave me instructions to deliver the papers in person to Robbins," he said, "and I shall do so. There's no reason why you should feel at all offended, Britt. It's your business to take the crew in and look out for the men."

The boss hunched his shoulders, scowling unpleasantly.

"All right," he said; "go ahead, young man. But if there's blazes to pay at Grindstone and you git beat up, don't say I didn't warn yer."

Turning, he pushed his way down the aisle, thrusting men aside in order to make a passage.

Merriwell had listened to this conversation with interest. Through it all he had kept his dark eyes fastened on Britt, and he continued to watch until the man stopped and bent over one of the crew to speak a few low words in his ear.

"Ned," said Dick suddenly. "I don't know much about your crew boss, but if I'm any judge of human nature he will bear watching."

CHAPTER II.

STORM SIGNALS AT GRINDSTONE.

All the way to Grindstone those men howled, and yelled, and wrangled, and sang. Several incipient fights were started, but Britt was on hand to check trouble, although he informed them that they could "pummel" one another as much as they chose as soon as they reached Grindstone.

"You, Reddy Flanagan," he roared, shaking his fist under the nose of a husky belligerent, "this is the third time you've tried to start something. If you don't sit down and keep still I'll knock your thick head off your shoulders! You know I can do it, too, for I give you the walloping of your life a year ago."

"Ye'll be after excusing me, Mr. Britt," said the red-headed man, relapsing onto his seat. "It's not
yezself I want trouble wid; it's that Swede thot kapes calling me out av me name. Oi'll break his face the minute Oi step off the train."

The offending Swede protested that he had done nothing to arouse the ire of the Irishman.

"Ay bane peaceful mans, Mr. Yannigan," he drawled. "Ay bane no fighter."

"Yannigan! Yah!" snarled the irate Reddy. "Ye hear him, gents—ye hear him calling me a yannigan. Ye hear him, boss. Av Oi ivir swing me right mall on him there'll be a funeral."

"Ay tal you Ay don't want to fight," protested the blond man. "Ay bane good fallar. Ay bane peaceful, quiet person."

"Ye'll be quiet enoun whin Oi land wan av me sleeping punches," was the retort.

"Now, Yannigan, you bettar keep away. Mebbe Ay might get mard. Ay don't like to get mard. One time Ay get mard and Ay bit 'nother fallar's nose off."

"Ye hear him!" cried Lannigan again. "Ye hear him, threatening to bite me nose off, gints! There'll be mourning in Dinmark and Sweden when Oi get through wid him."

And so when the train finally pulled into Grindstone, a town of less than a dozen buildings located on an icebound stream and set in a clearing that was bordered by the Big Woods, the Irishman swung off to the station platform, pulled on his braded boots, and waited for the offending Swede. The latter came down the car steps with reluctance, carrying his bag of clothes upon his back and his boots swung round his neck.

Without even giving the Swede time to put on his boots, Lannigan sailed into him. Three times he hit the blond man, while the latter continued to protest and plead. Then something happened. The Swede woke up with a roar like a mad bull and sailed into his assailant. It was all over in a jifly. Lannigan was hit just once on the jaw, and he lay down upon the platform, smiling in a sickly manner, his eyes closed. Even the victor seemed astonished by the abrupt termination of the affair, and stood looking down with his jaw drooping and his eyes bulging at his prostrate foe.

"Ay tole him mabbe Ay got mard," he muttered. "What mak' him stop so sune?"

"You've got the best end of it now, Oleson," said Britt, pushing the wondering Swede aside; "but you'll find Flannigan a regular bulldog. You'll have to lick him about six times before he will be satisfied that you can do it."

The soloist of the crew was inspired to sing again:

"When the ice goes down Menominee
We'll start the logs for the big fresh sea,—
Hooray! Hooray!
Hooray for the drive when the spring's alive;
But look out for us when we arrive,
Just out of the woods and fresh for fun,
We'll take the town of Marinette,
And we'll surely put her on the bun,
We'll clean her out, you bet! you bet!
For we're full of fight and pork and beans,
And you oughter know just what that means."

"All together, boys!" he shouted, with a grand flourish of his arms, and every man who could sing—or who thought he could—threw back his head and roared:

"Hooray, hooray for the Big North Woods!
Hooray, hooray for the men with the goods!
We love to hear the axes ring,
We know the tune the gash saws sing;
But most we love a rippin fight
When the drive is done and we're feeling right."

"What do you think of these lambs, Merriwell?" laughed Ned Bryce. "Aren't they a sweet, gentle bunch?"

"I should think such men would be about as easy to handle as a pack of wildcats," said Dick.

"They'll get all the fight out of them by the time the liquor they have guzzled has worn off, and thereafter they will be mild and peaceful enough. I don't see anything of Robbins. I expected he would be waiting for me here."

Bryce pushed his way through the crowd of swaying, unsteady men who packed the platform, looking for the man to whom he was to deliver the papers. The station agent, a lame man who was hobbling about attending to his duties, saw Ned and nodded to him.

"Seen anything of Hod Robbins, Fisher?" asked Bryce. "He was to meet me here."

The agent shook his head.

"Ain't seen him, Mr. Bryce," he answered. "Kirby's foreman is here, but I ain't seen Robbins."

Ned frowned.

"Kirby's foreman here!" he muttered. "I thought likely he might be hanging around. Still, I reckon Britt can look out for the bunch. I don't understand why Robbins isn't on hand."

Some of the crew had lifted Flannigan and were half carrying, half dragging him across the road toward a store which bore the sign, "S. Simpson, Pro-
visions and Supplies." The remainder of the crew followed in a straggling, shouting, singing line; for over at the store they could buy the things they needed to complete their outfits, as here they could obtain credit, the storekeeper accepting orders on the lumbering companies in lieu of cash.

"Of course it's possible Robbins didn't get my father's letter," said Bryce, "although it was forwarded in time and should have reached him."

"What will you do about it now, Ned?" asked Dick.

"Why, I'll have to take the papers into Camp Three."

"Is Britt going in there?"

"He goes to Camp Four, and has to pass Camp Three on his way."

"He seemed to feel hurt because he wasn't intrusted with the papers."

"For some reason my father insisted that I should deliver them to Robbins in person. I presume they're valuable plans or instructions. They're sealed, and I myself don't know their nature."

A tall, thin man in a leather coat, fur cap, and leggings came sauntering round the corner of the little station. He was chewing tobacco, with which his long, drooping mustache was stained. Observing Ned, he advanced straight toward the young man.

"Howdy do, Mr. Bryce," he said. "I callate you're looking for somebody you ain't found here, hey?"

"Yes, I'm looking for Robbins, of Camp Three, Wallace. He should have been here to meet me."

"I just got in from up the Floodwood this morning," said the man. "Saw Robbins three days ago, and he said he had a letter from your father tellin' him to be here without fail when the train pulled in. I've sorter been looking for him myself."

"Then he got the letter all right. Something must have happened. Somehow, I have a presentiment of trouble. Wallace, shake hands with my friend, Merriwell. Dick, Wallace is pretty well known as a hunter in these parts."

The man gave Merriwell a powerful grip, which was suggestive of the unusual strength that lay in his sinewy frame.

"I wouldn't wonder if you was right about trouble brewing, Mr. Bryce," he said. "If I was in your place I'd sartain watch this crew mighty close. Old King Kirby's cub is here in Grindstone."

"What—Bob Kirby here?"

"Yep, I seen him over at Simpson's store jest before the train arriv'. Your men have gone over there. If you don't want to lose some of this crew—mebbe the whole of them—you'd better s'anter over yourself and find out what's going on. Young Kirby's got Hank Hunker with him, and they ain't bothered to come down here to-day for their health."

"Come on, Dick," cried Ned instantly; "I've got to see what Bob Kirby's up to."

Merriwell had met Old King Kirby's son on a previous visit to the Big North Woods, and he knew that the fellow was a reckless character who held little regard for law or decency, and who would hardly hesitate at any act in order to gain his ends. As he hurriedly crossed the road at the side of Bryce he felt a certain tingling of his nerves as if they had grown taut with the apprehension of a personal encounter. The snow crunched beneath their feet. The afternoon sun shone dazzlingly upon the white stump-dotted expanses of the clearing. Still, the air was so sharp and cold that even where the sun fell in the lee of buildings the snow had not softened or melted.

Despite the chill air, Ben Britt was sitting on Simpson's steps whistling a piece of soft pine with a long, wicked-looking knife. Although he did not look up, Merriwell felt confident the man was aware of their approach.

"Brrr," said Bryce sharply, "they tell me Bob Kirby and Hank Hunker are here, and therefore we've got to look out for this crew. I understand Kirby is in the store. Is he?"

"I dunno," growled the crew boss; "I ain't been in there."

"Well, you'd better come in now if you don't want this crew shanghaied right under your nose."

"I had some trouble with Hunker once," muttered Britt. "If him and me meet up there's liable to be some doings. He swore he'd cut my haslet out next time we met. I'm not running away from him or any other man, but if your governor needs me in the woods this winter it will be just as well if I don't see Hunker, for either him or me would get fitted for a pine box, and 'tther one would have to stand trial."

Ned looked at Britt curiously. Never before had he known the man to falter or hesitate about facing any one.

"Oh, all right," he said. "If that's the way you feel about it you'd better put that knife up. Hunker might come out. It's not best for you two to get into trouble while either one of you has a toad-sticker in his hand."

"If I don't go looking for Hunker," said Britt, "and I'm whittling peaceful and minding my own business, I'll take my chances if he tries to jump me
and gets caught. You better not go in there yourself, Mr. Bryce.”

“Why not?”

“Well, you and young Kirby ain’t on the best footing, and it might be disagreeable. I’m here waiting for the boys to buy what they want and come out. I’ll take care of them. You leave it to me.”

“And, meanwhile, Kirby and Hunker may be proselyting this crew. I’ve never yet seen the time I was afraid to meet Bob Kirby face to face.”

“Well, if you get beat up remember that I warned you,” said Britt. “’Tain’t no place up here just now for youngsters like you and your friend, nohow.”

“Come on, Merriwell,” said Ned, as he mounted the steps.

The store was packed to suffocation. At the far end a man, mounted on a soap box, was addressing the crowd. He was a bronzed young fellow in rough and ready garb, and Merriwell recognized him instantly as Bob Kirby.

“You know my father’s record, men,” Kirby was saying. “He’s known from the Straits to Ironwood, from Menominee to Calumet. He’s set more dollars aloft in this country than all the other lumbermen combined. He’s a man who always makes good—a man of his word. When you hire with one of Old King Kirby’s bosses you know you’re going to get your cash, every dollar of it, when the spring pay-off comes round. When you hire with other men maybe you’ll get your money, and then again maybe you won’t.

“You remember what happened to Bartlett. You know what his men got—they got left. Bartlett went busted, and he couldn’t pay ten cents on a dollar. One hundred and forty-three men turned out after a winter’s work without a red penny. Did you ever hear that Old King Kirby let any man go who didn’t have the long green in his jeans? There are rumors that Bryce is up against it. He’s had some banking trouble. He’s tried to spread out too much. Wanted to be the whole show and gobble everything in sight, and as a result he’s got involved. Perhaps he’ll pull through all right; perhaps he won’t. If he goes broke like Bartlett, where’s your money coming from in the spring?

“We need two hundred more men on the Floodwood and the Grosbeck. We’re going to send our logs down ahead of anybody in the spring, if we have to land them on the ice and guard them with an army. Maybe Bryce won’t be able to float his after we’re through using the river. Will you take a sure thing, or do you want to chance it on a mighty slim uncertainty? If you’re ready to take a sure thing you just stick by Hunker, and he will land you at Kirby’s camps.”

As he spoke these final words he dropped a hand on the shoulder of a big, raw-boned, square-jawed giant who stood at his side, chewing tobacco.

“That’s me, gents,” rumbled this individual; “that’s me, Hank Hunker. I’ve worked for Old King Kirby five year straight now, and I know he’s a man that allus gives his men a square deal and pays the highest wages. Old Bryce is the laboring man’s enemy. He’s a skincher and a grinder. I know men that’s lost a leg or an arm working for him that’s never got a cent and—”

“That’s a lie, Hunker!” cried Ned Bryce, pushing his way through the mass of men with Merriwell following closely. “That’s a lie, and you know it!”

CHAPTER III.

THE STORM BREAKS.

Ned was thoroughly aroused. His blue eyes were flashing, his cheeks flushed, and his hands clinched. Without a thought of danger, he thrust men aside in order to confront Kirby and Hunker.

“This is a cheap, dirty, contemptible piece of business, Bob Kirby!” he flared; “but it’s just about what I’d expect from you or your father! These men are under contract with Henry Bryce, and they’re going to the Bryce camps. When you claim that my father is in financial difficulty you lie, and you know it. When you say he ever gave any man anything but a square deal you lie, and you know it. One thing is dead sure; Henry Bryce never tried to get another man’s crew away from him. I should think you’d be proud to hold up your father’s record, Kirby. He’s been in trouble with the courts time after time for lumber stealing. He’s the kind of a man who buys forty acres and cuts four hundred if he can. He got his holdings on the Floodwood through fraud. Still, he was trying to steal lumber there, and would have succeeded if we hadn’t nipped the game in the bud. At least, he’s had to pay the regulation price for what holdings he has secured in that section.”

Young Kirby stepped down from the soap box, his face wearing an ugly expression.

Hunker attempted to crowd forward, but Kirby pushed him back.
“I can take care of that fellow, Hunker,” he said. “I’ll ram his words down his throat.”

“Gents,” cried Simpson, a little bent-backed man with spectacles so thick and so heavy that they seemed to account for his round shoulders; “gents, you can’t raise a disturbance in my store. If there’s going to be any fighting you better git outside quick.”

With his hands on his hips, Ned Bryce confronted Bob Kirby.

“This is the second time this season you’ve tried this dirty game,” he said, his voice quivering with the anger that throbbéd in every part of his body. “First time you succeeded in leading off the larger part of a crew hired for the Bryce camps. This time you would have succeeded again if I hadn’t happened to come along.”

“Maybe I’ll take your crew with me just the same,” Bryce, sneered Kirby. “What do you think you can do? How do you propose to stop it?”

“If they go to your father’s camp you won’t make the trip with them!” panted Ned. “Come outside, Kirby—come out.”

“With pleasure,” said Bob. “Lead the way.”

But the moment Ned turned his back the treacherous fellow struck him a fearful blow behind the ear. Bryce fell against Merriwell, who was jostled and staggered a bit, but who whirled like a flash, stepped over his friend’s body, shot out his right fist, and followed it with his left as Kirby threw up both hands to parry the first blow.

Dick’s left reached the fellow’s jaw, and Hunker caught Kirby’s body in his arms, for that blow had sounded like the crack of a pistol, and the fellow was put out in a twinkling.

“Stop it! stop it!” squawked the storekeeper, wildly waving his hands. “I won’t have it in my place! Great bobcats! it will wreck my store if you start a rumpus!”

Hunker swung Kirby’s limp body round and tossed it into the arms of a man at his side.

“Jest lemme get my paws on that critter!” he roared. “I’ll break him plumb in two!”

“Come outside,” invited Dick; “come outside, you big blowhard, where there’s plenty of room. There’s no chance in here.”

“Ay tank that’s goode plan,” grunted Oleson, the Swede, as he stepped between them. “Ay tank these no place for fight.”

Hunker started to brush the Swede aside, but Oleson stood there like a rooted tree, mildly observing:

“You tak’ him oop, you fight him outside, Meester Man. That much bettar. Plenty room for fair show.”

“All right! all right!” rasped Hunker fiercely. “Let’s get outside quick. I’ll break his head! I’ll skin him alive, the little smooth-faced rat!”

The crowd surged toward the doors and poured out into the open air. With them went Dick Merriwell, followed by the friendly Swede, who had Hunker treading at his heels.

“Ay tank mabbe we see fair fight,” said Oleson, peeling off his outer coat and spitting on his hands. “Ay am peaceful mans, but Ay expect fair fight.”

“There won’t be much of a fight!” snarled Hunker, as he flung off his heavy coat. “It will be all over in a jiffy. Git away and let me come at him!”

Although he had been temporarily stunned by Kirby’s treacherous blow, Ned Bryce was now on hand to stand by his friend.

“It’s my fight, Merriwell!” he cried, pulling at Dick’s arm. “I have no right to bring you up here and get you into this sort of trouble with ruffians.”

“Don’t worry, Ned,” said the Yale lad; “I’ll try to take care of myself. This big brute isn’t as dangerous as he seems.”

“He’s a bad man. He’s a fighter. He’s the kind that bites and gouges, Dick. Don’t let him get you in his clutches.”

“Come on, come on, you white-livered dude!” raged Hunker. “You’re so scat now you’re pale around the gills. I’m going to skin you alive! I’ll turn you wrong side out! I’ll break every bone in your body!”

“Go for him, Hank!” cried a voice, as Bob Kirby appeared on the steps of the store.

He had recovered from that knock-out punch on the jaw, although he was still a bit unsteady upon his pins. His bronzed face was now purple with passion.

The men of the woods stood around, expecting to see a most one-sided affair. Indeed, some of them declared it was a shame to let big Hunker “chaw the city feller up,” and, taking pains not to let Hunker hear them, one or two proposed that they should unite and prevent the encounter. There was not among them all any one man who dared to face Hunker, and it is doubtful if any three of them would have ventured to do so in their sober senses.

Britt, the crew boss, kept in the background, making no move to interfere. Indeed, he seemed trying to hide all too evident satisfaction in the turn of affairs. To himself he whispered:

“Mebbe Hen Bryce will learn better than to send
his kid up here with private papers he won't trust with me."

Simpson, the round-shouldered storekeeper, peered over his spectacles from the open door.

Above the door a window was suddenly lifted, and in it appeared a girl of seventeen or eighteen, with dark hair, deep brown eyes, and flushed cheeks. It was Simpson's daughter, known far and wide as "the Belle of Grindstone," and generally acknowledged the handsomest girl in the great timber country. Leaning out, with her elbows on the windowsill, she looked down and saw Bob Kirby beneath her upon the steps. Her lips seemed to curl and her eyes flash at sight of the man.

Half the crew discovered the girl up there in the window and pulled off their headgear, their attention turned to her for a moment, despite the deep interest which the coming fist fight held for them.

"What are you doing, men?" called the girl. "Are you going to let big Hank Hunker beat up a boy?"

Dick flushed now, for, in spite of the fact that he looked really boyish among those bearded huskies of the Big Woods, it touched his pride to have any one fancy him incapable of defending himself against a single antagonist. In a moment, however, he laughed as he snatched off his cap and gave her a bow.

"Don't worry about the boy, miss," he said, in his most reckless, dare-devil manner. "He will try to take care of himself."

In another this might have seemed like boasting. Possibly it did seem boastful to those men who knew and feared Hank Hunker, the fighter. Nevertheless, they could not help admiring the youngster's sand, and they ventured to give him a feeble cheer.

That cheer infuriated Hunker still more, and he roared:

"Look out for me, you babby! I'm a-coming for yer!"

Then he charged.

CHAPTER IV.

A SURPRISING FINISH.

"Room! room!" cried Ned Bryce, thrusting the men back. "Give them plenty of room! Look out for him, Dick! Don't let him grab you!"

For Hunker was reaching to get his huge paws on the boy, who had dodged and retreated to avoid that first fierce rush. He followed up closely, but, with amazing nimbleness, Merriwell escaped, shooting out a foot which caught Hunker's ankles and swept his legs from beneath him, bringing the man down with a thud and a grunt.

"Ho!" shouted the spectators.

The giant scrambled up, astounded and doubly infuriated. There seemed a reddish gleam of ferocity in his eyes, and he snarled his rage like a maddened wild beast. At the boy he rushed once more, with Ned Bryce still crying for the men to keep back and make room.

On the store steps Bob Kirby, slowly shaking off his dizziness, produced a cigar, bit off the end with his clean white teeth, struck a match, and began to smoke.

"Hunker will break the fellow's back," said Kirby.

"He's simply taken the job off my hands."

The girl in the window above suddenly exclaimed:

"You coward—oh, you coward!"

Kirby looked up, smiled at her, and lifted his hat.

"I wasn't aware you were home, Bess," he said. "I thought your father had sent you down to Fond du Lac school. This is a pleasant surprise."

Her scorn was unspeakable. Indeed, she made no retort in words, but if her eyes could have stabbed he would have fallen, pierced to the heart.

Meantime, Merriwell was doing some lively work to prevent the bully of the woods from folding him in crushing embrace. Three times Dick hit the giant, but, being unable to get in anything but a defensive blow while retreating, the effect was much like the stinging of wasps. It simply added to the beastly rage of Hunker.

Bryce was quivering in every nerve. Even though he had dared to call Hunker a falsifier in Simpson's store, he knew the man's reputation, and he feared that Merriwell would be maimed for life should he fall into big Hunker's clutches.

Standing in the background, Ben Britt folded his arms across his deep chest and watched as if the affair was a matter of the utmost unconcern to him.

The whisky-soaked crew, however, was deeply interested, and some were very much excited. One little shifty-eyed chap by the name of Tommy Nash kept dancing out into the circle and seeking to curry favor with Hunker by yelling for him to "soak the dude." Nash had once felt the heavy hand of the giant, and he fancied this was the proper way to win Hunker's regard. To his amazement, as the big man rushed at Dick and the latter again avoided him, Tommy received a kick from Hunker's boot which lifted him and sent him headlong into the midst of his comrades, squawking with pain.
“Keep out o’ the way, you herringbone!” snarled Hunker, as he turned panting and faced Dick, who stood ten or twelve feet away with his hands on his hips, his cheeks flushed, his eyes bright, his lips smiling.

“Well don’t you stand up and take your medicine, you smooth-faced dude?” roared the ruffian. “I’ll git you if I have to chase yer till sundown. And when I do git yer, I’m going to wring yer out like a wet rag, jest to pay yer for the trouble you’re a-making me.”

“Oh, come on, you big-mouthed bluffer!” cried Merriwell tauntingly. “You couldn’t lick a postage stamp. You’re the biggest lumber-heels I ever saw. You know about as much about fighting as a cow knows about arithmetic.”

Such taunts sent the blood to Hunker’s head with a rush that half blinded him. He charged again, and this time, ere retreating, Merriwell struck the giant’s hands aside and smashed him a blow full and fair on the mouth that made him stagger a little.

“Ho!” shouted the spectators.

“Woo!” squealed Tommy Nash. “He hit Hunker! Smash him, Hank! Fix him for that! You’re the boy, Hunker!”

The language which burst from the bruiser’s lips caused the girl in the window to clap her hands over her ears. Nevertheless, she remained at her post, for she believed the handsome, clean-looking, athletic youth who was facing the ruffian must eventually fall a victim to Hunker’s brutal powers, and she meant to appeal to the men to intervene ere the infuriated brute should do Dick any mortal injury.

“If you were any part of a man, Bob Kirby,” she cried, “you’d stop it! You’ve proved yourself a coward before this. This is double evidence.”

Kirby shrugged his shoulders, removed the cigar from his mouth, and blew a wreath of blue smoke from his lips. In no other way did he betray that he heard her words.

With a trickle of blood at one corner of his mouth where his lip had been cut by his teeth, Hunker looked like a mad bulldog as he advanced slowly upon Dick. This time he took pains to drive the youth back before him, giving him no chance to dodge past. Once or twice when Merriwell seemed inclined to dodge the giant stepped sideways with his arms outspread to clutch him.

“Oh, come on;” he invited; “come to my bosom. I’ll break your delicate ribs, same as a grizzly bear would crush the ribs of a baby.”

Ned Bryce was in a panic, for he saw that the giant meant to corner Dick, and he pleaded for the men to make way and give Merriwell sufficient room to continue his tactics of dodging.

Suddenly, to the astonishment of every one, Dick leaped forward. His fists shot out, but the first blow was intended to deceive his antagonist, and it led Hunker into flinging up both hands. The second blow struck the huge man fairly in the solar plexus, and would have put him down and out had he not been as hard as nails. As it was, his breath was knocked from his lips in a puffing grunt, and for a moment he gasped and staggered. Dick followed up with still another blow, seeking to plant it on Hunker’s jaw, but getting the man on the cheek bone beneath his eye and cutting a gash with his knuckles.

Bob Kirby swore beneath his breath, astounded by what he saw.

Ben Britt permitted his arms to unfold and his hands to drop to his hips, while he muttered:

“Well, I’ll be hanged!”

Again the crowd of spectators shouted. Tommy Nash wrung his hands and stamped on the ground, squealing:

“Stop fooling with him, Hunker! Git at him, old boy! Eat him up! Eat him alive!”

Ned Bryce felt his heart leap with exultation, but still the apprehension he had experienced at first was heavy upon him. He knew how much punishment a man like Hunker could take without seeming to suffer serious effect from it, and he still feared for his friend. He was determined to take a hand at once should the ruffian get the best of it and attempt any of his brutal, beastlike biting or eye gouging.

As Merriwell retreated the ruffian gathered himself and lunged forward for another charge.

Ned Bryce uttered a cry of dismay and horror, for apparently Dick’s feet slipped on the hard-trodden snow. At any rate, he seemed to stagger, and Hunker, lunging forward, shot out his arms to close on the youth.

One of Hunker’s hands passed over Dick Merriwell’s shoulder, with Dick turned so that his back was almost directly toward the giant. Quick as a flash of lightning, Merriwell seized the bruiser’s wrist, turned the palm of the man’s hand uppermost, used Hunker’s arm as a lever, and, helped by the man’s forward rush, sent his heels spinning into the air. To the unspeakable wonderment of every witness, the famous Yale athlete hurled that terror of the woods fairly over his head and flung him to the snow some ten
feet away. As Hunker spun over the youth's head the gaping crowd heard a distinct snapping sound.

The ruffian landed on his head and shoulders and lay still, groaning.

"Well, may I be shot!" gasped Bob Kirby, flinging aside his cigar and springing down from the store steps.

Rushing forward, he bent over Hunker, grasping the man by the shoulder.

Instantly the giant uttered a howl of pain.

"Don't—don't touch me there!" he cried. "My shoulder is broke!"

CHAPTER V.

THE GAME BLOCKED.

Ned Bryce seized Merriwell and hugged him.

"Great work, old boy!" he cried delightedly. "I was shivering all the time. You've put him out of commission sure with a broken shoulder."

"I doubt if his shoulder is broken," said Dick.

"But I heard it snap."

"Likely it's twisted out of the socket."

Tommy Nash, sycophant, had joined Bob Kirby and was bending over the groaning ruffian.

"Too bad!" said Tommy. "It's a shame! Ain't there nothing we can do for you, Hunker?"

"Get out, drat yer!" wheezed Hunker, glaring at Tommy with such unspeakable fury that the little man retreated precipitately, catching his heels and sitting down on the snow with a jolt.

The crew was inclined to crowd around Dick, some of them, in spite of their previous awe of Hunker, expressing their congratulations in an inebriated way.

"Oh, keep away, men!" cried Ned Bryce, pushing some of them off.

Dick was handed his coat and cap. As he put them on the girl in the window gave a call which attracted his attention.

She had plucked a red blossom from a flowering house plant and was holding it in her hand. As he looked up she touched the flower to her lips and then cast it toward him.

Dick thrust out his hand and caught it as it fell. Off came his cap, and he bowed his thanks. Then he thrust the stem of the flower through the buttonhole in the lapel of his coat. The girl, blushing crimson, withdrew, closed the window and disappeared.

Some of the men gave a husky cheer.

"I tell yer my shoulder is broke!" Hunker was groaning. "He broke my shoulder, Mr. Kirby."

"Let me see—let me examine it, Hunker," urged Bob Kirby. "I don't believe it's broken. It's—why, it's out of the socket. We can pull it back into place in no time. Come here, one or two of you men, and give me a hand."

"Go ahead," nodded Ned Bryce. "If you can help him it's all right."

Three or four of the men joined Kirby. The injured ruffian was snarling and swearing painfully. He set his teeth, however, and permitted those men, directed by Kirby, to pull at his arm in an effort to drag the shoulder back into place. At last, unable to endure it longer, he cursed them for a pack of fools.

Dick Merriwell thrust two of those men aside, and in a moment he had stepped out behind the injured ruffian. Without a word he placed both hands on Hunker's shoulder, driving his thumbs hard against the shoulder point, at the same time giving a sharp twist.

There was a snap as the bone returned to its proper place.

Hunker gave a smothered cry of pain, followed by an exclamation of relief.

Then he turned and saw who had set his shoulder.

For a moment it seemed that the bully of the woods would attempt to renew the attack upon Dick then and there. Kirby, however, held fast to Hunker, speaking swiftly in his ear.

"No use, Hank, you can't handle that arm. You're no match for him with one hand, even if he does look like a boy. Have sense. He's a college athlete. It's really no great disgrace to be whipped by him."

"I'll never git over it," muttered Hank in shame. "A boy—nothing but a boy!"

"You forced me to fight," said Dick, facing the man fearlessly; "but you weren't as much to blame as your companion and backer, Kirby. He brought you down here thinking you could terrorize people on your reputation. He tried a dirty piece of business. He attempted to hire a crew away from another man. Although I'm not familiar with the etiquette and code of the woods, that seems to me like a contemptible trick."

While he was speaking he kept his eyes almost constantly on Kirby. The latter felt the sting of Merriwell's contempt, and after what he had seen he had no heart for an attempt to silence the Yale man's lips.

"Oh, you're an upstart," he declared. "I don't know what business you have to meddle in this affair, any-
how. If you hang around these parts long you'll be mighty sorry that you did meddle."

"You know he's telling you the truth when he says it was a contemptible trick you tried, Kirby," flared Ned Bryce. "No respectable boss ever tries to hire men away from another employer. You didn't get my men, and I don't believe you will get them. I have an idea that they will stick to me."

Then he turned to the crew.

"Boys," he said, "take it from me that there's not a word of truth in what Kirby said about my father being in financial trouble. He's got money enough in the bank to carry him through two years of timber cutting if he doesn't take in another dollar in that time. You'll get your pay, every man of you, and get it regular. If you want it, you needn't wait till spring, either; you can have it monthly. I'll guarantee that. Now, will you stick by Henry Bryce, the man you hired with, or are you going to quit him for old Kirby?"

"Ay tank we'll stick by Meester Bryce," said Oleson.

"Ay don't blieve any mans here is goin' quit him."

"No! no!" was the cry. "We'll stick by Bryce!"

"That's the talk!" cried Ned; "and you'll never regret it."

In a low tone he said to Dick:

"If Hunker had whipped you I'd lost the whole bunch. You have saved this crew for us."

Not even Tommy Nash ventured to join Kirby.

"Boys," said Ned Bryce, pointing toward a long, low building, "there's Pitt's boarding house. Our teams from the camps aren't here to take in your dummage. It's getting late, and we'll stay here until to-morrow morning. Go ahead over to Pitt's, and I'll make arrangements for your accommodations tonight."

"Come on, every man!" called Oleson, starting.

They followed him toward the boarding house, straggling out in an irregular line, some of them beginning to sing, while others once more showed an inclination to settle personal quarrels among themselves.

Bryce stepped over to the crew boss, to whom he spoke in a low tone.

"What's the matter with you, Britt?" he asked sharply. "You are acting queerly, to say the least. You've stood back as if you had no interest in this crew."

The man flushed and hunched his shoulders a little.

"I wasn't going to get into a mix-up with Hunker," he said. "Nobody'd ever s'posed your friend ever could whip big Hunker. I dunno how he did it, Mr. Bryce. You seem to be taking charge of this crew yourself. I'm letting you run things."

"I have taken charge of it because you were behaving so queerly," said Ned. "I don't suppose you've sold out to Kirby?"

"You ain't trying to insult me, be you, sir?" savagely questioned Britt. "Mebbe I ain't competent to take some papers in to Hod Robbins, but——"

"Oh, that's what's the matter with you, is it? Now, look here, Ben, when my father gives me instructions to deliver important papers into the hands of a certain person I'm going to come pretty near doing so. If I should return and tell him I'd handed those papers over to you for delivery he would be sore on me, whether he trusted you or not. Get out of this grouch and don't act childish, Britt. You ought to understand my position. Go on over there and make arrangements with Pitt to take care of the men. I've decided that we'll stay right here in Grindstone tonight. Perhaps Robbins will show up with the teams later on. Something may have happened to delay him."

Without a word the sulky crew boss turned and followed the men toward the boarding house.

Dick had kept his eyes on Kirby and Hunker. He saw them depart up the snowy road and turn in at a small frame house on the outskirts of the little settlement.

"Well," he said, with a smile, "this has been rather a lively time, Bryce. I wasn't looking for just this sort of sport when I accepted your invitation to come up into the woods."

"And I didn't suppose for a minute, Merriwell, that you'd have to get mixed up in my affairs in such a manner. I'm certainly greatly obliged to you, and I swear I never was prouder of a man in my life. You helped me block Kirby's treachery. Let's go back across to the station and take our kits over to the boarding house."

At the railway station they found their luggage and rifles. Pitt, the keeper of the boarding house, met them as they entered.

"You didn't send me no word, Mr. Bryce," he said, "so I ain't proper prepared for this crew."
"We didn’t expect to stop here to-night, Pitt. We intended to rush the men into the woods as fast as possible. Our plans are upset. You can put them up somehow, can’t you?"

"Oh, I cal’late we can stow ’em away, and mebbe we’ll have grub enough to fill ’em, though I doubt it. They’ve all whetted their appetites with redeye, and they’ll eat like sharks. I’ve told Britt I’d do my best for them. I thought mebbe you might want to stop here, too, so I’ve held out the best room I’ve got for you."

"I’m much obliged," said Ned. "We’ll go up to that room."

The best room in the boarding house proved to be poor enough, although there was a little box stove in it and plenty of firewood piled in a corner.

"Britt’s got the next room to this," explained the proprietor, jerking his finger toward the thin partition. "He’ll have to take in three men with him, and there’ll be a few of this crowd that will sleep on the floor to-night if they sleep anywhere."

A fire in the little stove finally dispelled a cheerful warmth through the room and made them feel that the situation was far from uncomfortable after all. Nevertheless, Ned continued to worry over the failure of Robbins to put in an appearance. Again and again he expressed his fear that Kirby had tampered with Robbins.

"Still," he said, "that man has always seemed trustworthy. I know my father trusts him. That’s why he’s sending these papers in to Robbins."

Below in the big sitting room of the boarding house the men could be heard singing lustily.

"If Robbins doesn’t appear——" began Dick.

"I’ll take the crew in myself," said Ned Bryce. "If you don’t want to come along, Dick, you can take the train out of Grindstone to-morrow."

"Do you think I would desert you now?"

"But there’s no telling when I’ll come out if I have to go in to the camps. You only have about so much vacation time."

"If I don’t get back to college promptly on the dot I shall stick by you, Ned," said Dick.
gouged an eye out of one or two men, besides disfiguring others by biting off their ears and noses."

"And that's the kind of a human hyena Bob Kirby takes around with him to frighten folks," said the storekeeper. "I'm afraid you ain't seen the last of this, Mr. Bryce. I'm mighty feared that Kirby's going to make further trouble for yer. You know them Kirbys ain't no quitters, whatever else you may say about 'em. I ca'llate my girl was as tickled as anybody to see them git the worst of it."

"But I thought——" murmured Bryce, and then he checked himself.

"Yes, I know what you thought," nodded the little bent man. "She did make a fool of herself, but she was young. Bob Kirby has got a smooth tongue. I told her—I told her the son of a rich man like him wouldn't be serious with a poor girl up here in the woods. But you know everybody has told her how good-looking she was, and she sorter got her head turned for a time. She sorter thought she was about the best-looking girl to be found anywhere. Well, mebbe you put plenty of stylish clothes on her and you might have to travel some distance to find her match. She takes her good looks from her mother. She don't git none of them from me. I own that up honest. Her mother was a handsome girl, and folks always wondered why she ever married Sile Simpson."

"I'm—I'm glad," hesitated Ned, "if Miss Bessie has got her eyes opened to the real character of Bob Kirby."

"He fooled her for a while, but she's pretty shrewd, after all, and he didn't make much out of it. When she found he had another girl down in Sawtown that he was shining up to the same way, and still another over in Escanopa, and nobody knows how many more of 'em, she come to her senses mighty sudden. Now she's purty sorry to think she ever threw over a decent feller because he was jealous of Bob Kirby and objected to her having anything to say to him. Oh, it has taught her a good lesson; there ain't no question about that.

"I'm glad to know you understand it, Mr. Bryce, and don't hold no feelings against me because of what Kirby was up to in my place of business. I'm afraid mebbe you've made a mistake by not pushing on tonight. I'm kinder doubting your wisdom in hanging up here in Grindstone with this crew."

"Why so?"

"Well, I dunno, but I've got an idee Bob Kirby will make you more trouble before you git in to the camps. I hope not, but I'd keep my eyes open if I was in your place and be ready for any sort of a shenanigan."

With this as a parting admonition, the storekeeper returned to his place of business.

A short time later the crew was called to sit down at the two long tables in the dining room, where beans and brown bread and coffee made up the main substance of the meal served them. Britt, in charge of the men, attended rather sullenly to his duties.

"They're all here, Mr. Bryce," he reported, "except Tommy Nash. I dunno what's become of him. Mebbe he's quit. He had a fight with Ropaine, the Canuck who accused him of stealing some whisky, and Tommy got the worst of it."

"Well, if he's the only man we lost we can stand it," said Ned.

"Nash is a good teamster," declared Britt. "Keep the redeye away from him, and he's all right."

The beans, huge, red yellow-eyes, steaming hot, tasted good to Dick Merriwell. The brown bread, although somewhat soggy, was likewise palatable, and the coffee was not bad.

Dick made a satisfactory meal and retired to the big sitting room, where a roaring fire had heated the huge air-tight stove red-hot on both sides. The lamps were lighted, for darkness had long since settled over the Big Woods.

One by one the men, their hunger satisfied, returned from the dining room, and pipes were produced. Food had seemingly sobered them, and there was no longer any pronounced disposition to wrangle or fight. They sat around smoking and telling stories, while Dick watched and listened, deeply interested in this phase of life. In a corner Bryce talked with Britt.

Suddenly Dick heard a faint tapping on the window pane at his back. Looking round, he beheld a face pressed almost against the pane.
It was the face of the girl who had thrown him the flower which he still wore upon the lapel of his coat.

She lifted her right hand and beckoned for him to come out, at the same time pressing the tips of the fingers of her left hand to her lips.

Then she drew quickly back and vanished in the darkness.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WARNING.

Naturally, Dick Merriwell was surprised. He felt sure the girl had meant her signals for him. While she had beckoned with one hand, with the other she had touched her lips as a token that he should be silent.

In spite of his many and diversified experiences, Dick felt his cheeks beginning to burn. And it is stating no more than the plain truth to say that he hesitated a little time as to the wisdom of obeying that silent summons. While he hesitated he speculated as to the possible meaning of Bess Simpson’s strange act.

The girl had rejoiced in his triumph over Hank Hunker, at the same time somewhat boldly tempting Bob Kirby. She had flung him a flower, which he still wore upon his coat. She had smiled at him before all those men.

But Dick, having seen such girls before, wondered if she had not done these things to irritate Bob Kirby or to arouse his jealousy. If so, Merriwell was wholly disinclined to be drawn in any sort of a complication. The girl was pretty, and the natural gallantry of youth had led him to smile back at her and to wear the flower she had tossed him. Nevertheless, to become a cat’s-paw for her was something to which he was decidedly averse.

There remained the possibility that she was sincere and genuinely fascinated by the handsome Yale man who had courageously faced the bully of the Big North Woods and whipped him in the presence of his fellows. Such a contingency as this, however, was even more distasteful than anything else, as Dick had no desire for even a passing flirtation with the Belle of Grindstone.

But it might be that she was moved by deeper and more serious motives. It might be that she was seeking to befriend him, and it was possible he would make a mistake if he failed to answer her signals.

And so, while the men came trooping back from the dining room and one of them got out an accordion and began manipulating it to the delight of the others gathering again in the big sitting room of the boarding house, Dick found his cap, buttoned his coat across his chest, and sauntered out into the open air.

The night was dark and overcast, with no moon and not even a peeping star to be seen through a cloud rift. There was a hush in the air, as if the world waited in silent expectancy for something that was to come.

Blinded in the darkness, Merriwell paused a few feet from the door, waiting until his eyes should become accustomed to the gloom. Beneath his feet the snow lay white and cold, and gradually he could see it spreading away into the distance. A light gleamed in the windows of Simpson’s store. Two or three other lights twinkled from still other windows.

All at once a feeling of loneliness came over Dick Merriwell. Of a sudden he seemed to realize for the first time that he was far from towns and cities and the great throbbing, pulsing heart of the world. The spell of the northland, the lonely thrill of the Great Woods, came and took possession of him.

Accompanied by the accordion, some of the men within the boarding house were singing:

“Oh, that girl, that pretty little girl,
The girl I left behind me!
She gave me a curl, a pretty little curl,
So that it would remind me.
Her eyes are bright and her teeth are white,
She’s a reg’lar peach, she’s out of sight—
The girl I left behind me.”

Dick was beginning to wonder if he had dreamed that he saw the girl’s face at the window when through the darkness a figure stepped into view at the corner of the building.

“Mr. Merriwell!”
It was the girl's voice, soft, suppressed, and guarded.

He advanced toward her.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "I was not sure you meant that signal for me."

"I came to see Ned Bryce," she explained; "but he was talking to some one in there, and I couldn't attract his attention. That's why I tapped on the window and signaled you."

There was something mysterious in her words and manner. She seemed a bit nervous and excited.

Dick breathed easier; for now it seemed evident that his fears and doubts concerning her had been unfounded.

"Is there any trouble?" he asked. "Is there anything the matter?"

"You're Ned Bryce's friend, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes."

"And you're certainly not friend of the Kirbys. I saw you whip that big ruffian, Hank Hunker. I saw you face him with such courage, but I was afraid for you. So I opened my window and remained there to cry out to the men and urge them to part, you should get you down and attempt any of his terrible tricks on you. Perhaps it seemed unladylike of me to stay there and watch a fist fight, but I was afraid for you, and that's why I remained in the window through it all."

"I— I thank you," faltered Dick. "It was very good of you to take such an interest in me, Miss Simpson."

"That wasn't my only reason," she confessed. "I knew Bob Kirby was down there. I heard him trying to get Bryce's men to desert. Oh, it's just like him! He's a snake, Mr. Merriwell, though he doesn't look it. Why, there was a time when I thought him the handsomest feller I'd ever seen. Oh, I know people have talked about me, but they didn't have no right to. I've always behaved myself. Was it a crime if I found Bob Kirby more interesting than the other men I know? There are some men in yonder which are fair specimens of the most who come here to Grindstone."

They're just rough and uncultured, and naturally Bob Kirby stood out big and conspicuous among such as them. Oh, yes, I made a fool of myself. I had a good feller, and we quarreled over Kirby. I told Cole Archer he had no right to be jealous because I was friendly with Mr. Kirby. I admit that I got pretty high-headed and took pains to show Cole that he couldn't order me around. Then after that, when he left me in a huff, I pretended to be even more interested in Kirby than I really was, for I was proud, and I didn't want anybody to know I cared because Cole and I had fussed. But when I found out that Kirby had girls everywhere he went, I told him a few things.

"I don't know why I'm telling you this, Mr. Merriwell. I'm just like my father says every woman is, I s'pose—I talk too much. I didn't come here to talk about myself, but speaking of Kirby led me round to it. He's going to make a lot of trouble for Mr. Bryce."

"Why, he tried his trouble making and fizzled at it."

"Oh, but he isn't done. He's uglier than ever now. I've found out something sure. Just ran over a little while ago to call on Mrs. O'Brien for a few minutes. She told me Kirby had been there. He came for her Injun boy, Sammy Smoke. Kirby promised Sam a lot of money if he'd start right off to-night for Kirby's camps and carry a message. Near as Mrs. O'Brien could get it, Kirby has sent in for a big crew of men to come out and meet Bryce's crew on the tote road. When that happens there's going to be a big mix-up, or else Kirby will carry off Bryce's whole crew.

"Well, this is interesting!" breathed Dick. "And the Indian boy went, did he?"

"Yes, he's gone. He's the fastest runner in these parts, and he will make Kirby's camps by the middle of to-morrow forenoon. Kirby will have two men to your one, and you'll never get your crew in to Bryce's."

"Evidently the kettle has just begun to boil," muttered Dick.

"There's another thing Ned Bryce ought to know."

"What's that?"
"He can't trust his crew boss."
"Britt?"
"Yes, Ben Britt."
"Do you think Britt is treacherous?"
"I'm dead certain he's playing into Bob Kirby's hands. Kirby has bought Britt off."
"I noticed the man was acting queer. He sulked because Ned wouldn't turn over some important papers for him to carry in to the boss of Camp Three."
"You tell Ned Bryce not to trust any important papers in Ben Britt's clutches. If he does, Britt will hand 'em right over to the Kirbys. Of course, you'll have to let Ned Bryce know who told you about this, but maybe it will be best if you caution him not to say anything about me. My father's afraid to get mixed up in any trouble with the Kirbys. He says old man Kirby would put him out of business if he took a notion."
"You can trust me to be discreet, Miss Simpson."
"Are you going into the woods with the men?" faltered the girl.
"I expect to now."
"Then maybe you'll see Cole Archer at Bryce's Camp One. If you do, and you can find any way to make it come round natural, you might let him know that I'm sore on Bob Kirby and don't propose ever to have anything more to do with that feller."
"I'll take particular pains to do you the favor if I get the opportunity, Miss Simpson," Dick promised, smiling a bit in spite of himself.
"I s'pose you're laughing at me," she said, turning her head away. "I s'pose you think I'm a silly, foolish girl. Well, maybe I am. I own up that I was silly to throw down a decent feller like Cole just because a rich man's son flattered me by soft words and smiles and attentions. But we all make mistakes, don't we?"
"Sure," answered Dick cheerfully. "And sometimes the mistakes which seem big and full of consequences pan out in the end not to be so serious, after all. I wouldn't worry about Cole Archer. If he finds out in time, as he will, that you're no longer friendly with Bob Kirby, and that it was you who threw Kirby over, he will come back to you."
"I don't know—how I ever could face him," she murmured. "I'd be so ashamed I'd feel like dying. We wasn't exactly engaged, Cole and I, but we might have been any time if I'd only consented. I kind of kept putting him off. I s'pose he fancies I was mercenary and mean and all that, but I hope he'll find out it wasn't Bob Kirby who got tired of me and threw me over. I reckon I'd better get back to the store now. Good night, Mr. Merriwell. I hope Ned Bryce finds some way to get the best of Bob Kirby, but if he does he'll do better than most people. Good night."

Turning, she hurried away, and he watched her dark figure growing dimmer in the dense gloom of the night until at last he could see it no more.

Within the boarding house the men were still roaring:

"Oh, that girl, that pretty little girl, That girl I left behind me!"

CHAPTER VIII.
THE MAN UNDER THE BED.

Tommy Nash, with a stolen pint, toasted his feet at the little box stove in the room given to Ned Bryce and Dick Merriwell. Tommy had pilfered the bottle and its contents from the pocket of a crew mate's jacket hanging in the sitting room downstairs and hidden it where he could put his hand on it any time; but Tommy was suspected and accused by the man who had lost the liquor, following which there was a brief fistic encounter terminated by Ben Britt, who flung one man into a corner and kicked the other out of doors.

The latter happened to be Tommy, who sat on the snow for some minutes, wiping the blood from his bruised nose.

"Ain't got no right to treat an honest man this fashion," muttered Tommy. "How they going to prove I swiped Ropaine's booze? They can't prove it, and, therefore, consequently and likewise, I didn't steal it. Ben Britt is too anxious to mix into any
little argument betwixt other folks. He takes special delight in kicking me, he does. I resent it. Why didn’t he kick the Canuck out of doors instead of me? It’s cold out here. My feelings is hurt. I’ve got tender feelings, and they’re hurt easy. Besides that, my nose is hurt where it accidentally got against Kopaine’s fist. Furthermore, my fingers is almost froze. If I go back in there mebbe Britt will kick me out again. Mebbe he’ll throw me out hère to freeze stiff. I know where there’s something to warm me up. I wish I had it here.”

Tommy drooled as he thought of the bottle he had hidden. Then he rose to his feet and crept back into the boarding house, dodging past the open door of the sitting room. No one paid any attention to him, which enabled him to secure the bottle of liquor, after which he crept softly up the stairs.

“Dunno where they intend for me to sleep tonight,” whispered Nash to himself; “but mebbe they think of putting me out in the barn with the horses and the pigs. Here’s where I fool ’em. Here’s where I find my berth and take to it. I ain’t hungry. Why should I be hungry when I’ve got plenty to drink? A man don’t have no business to eat when he’s drinking.”

By chance Tommy finally wandered into the corner front room, the door of which had been left unlocked. He seemed to smell the heat creeping out through the crack beneath the door, and he chuckled when he found the lock did not bar him.

“Here’s where I can be comfortable and sociable all by myself,” laughed Tommy. “This must be the room for old Bryce’s son and his friend. They don’t warm rooms for the rest of us culch. We can sleep anywhere. Here’s plenty of wood and a nice little fire and a comfortable chair, and I’ve got some joy juice to make me contented.”

Opening the top of the stove and dropping a big stick into it, Tommy settled himself on a chair and produced the bottle. His first pull at it lowered the contents of that bottle amazingly.

“Ah-ah-ah!” breathed Tommy, replacing the stopper and rubbing his stomach. “That went to the right spot. There’s nothing like it. Why, say, talk about luxury and comfort, this is it. Give me plenty of good liquor, and I’d set right here and drink it till spring broke and never make no murmur or complaint.”

Tommy heard the supper bell when it summoned his comrades to beans and brown bread, but there was still considerable liquor in the bottle, and the little teamster knew that would in all probability be the last he would get for some months to come. Therefore he simply wagged his hand in the air and chuckled.

“Go eat. Go stuff yourself with beans. I’ll git plenty of that fodder ’twixt now and Fools’ Day.”

For a time, overcome by the warmth and the effect of drink, Tommy dozed on his chair.

He was awakened by falling out of the chair and striking his head against the stove.

“Gee hocus!” he spluttered, rubbing his head and seeming to get a smell of singed hair. “Where be I? I was dreamin’ a sweet, delightful dream. I thought I was sailin’ a boat on a sea o’ good old rye whisky, and all I had to do was stop when I was thirsty and dip up a drink with the bailin’ can. Then all to once the boat struck plumb on a rock, and—I woke up. Hello, here’s—here’s something. I declare if it ain’t a bottle! I declare if there ain’t something in it! I declare if it wasn’t careless in me leavin’ anything in a bottle!”

But, having dragged himself back to the chair and started to uncork the bottle, he stopped suddenly, his mouth open, one ear cocked toward the door.

“Somebody’s comin’!” he gasped in alarm. “Mebbe they’re comin’ here! If they catch me mebbe they’ll kick me out into the cold again. I don’t like it out there. It’s lots better here. I guess I’d better git under kivir.”

With the bottle in his bosom, Tommy made haste to crawl under the bed.

Dick Merriwell entered the room, followed by Ned Bryce.

“Hello,” said Ned, “we left this lamp burning. I didn’t know that. That little stove certainly is a heater. This room is almost too warm to be comfortable. I’ll open a window and let in a little air.”
“Awful careless,” whispered Tommy to himself beneath the bed. “I might catch cold in the draught.”

Lying there, Nash heard Dick Merriwell tell young Bryce all about Bess Simpson’s warning. This was interesting enough to keep Tommy awake, although he found it fairly comfortable beneath the bed.

“Oh, so that’s Kirby’s game!” exclaimed Ned in exasperation. “He isn’t satisfied, I see. He’s going to attempt to carry my men off by main force, is he? Who ever heard of such high-handed lawlessness? The Kirby’s will overstep themselves yet. They hold a certain contempt of the law, having succeeded thus far in wiggling out of all their scrapes by one method or another. And she said that Britt couldn’t be trusted, did she? I don’t like to think she is right about that. I know he’s behaved rather oddly, but he’s a queer, sensitive, sulky man who resents it if he fancies he’s not fully trusted in everything. Something must be done, Merriwell. I can’t let Kirby kidnap my men.”

For a few moments young Bryce paced the floor. Suddenly he stopped.

“I have an idea!” he exclaimed.

“I hope it’s a promising one,” said Dick.

“Zeb Wallace—he’s the man.”

“The hunter we met at the station?”

“Yes.”

“The man for what?”

“The man to hold his own with Sammy Smoke. The man to carry word to Henry Bryce’s camps and bring out a bunch of fighting terriers to meet Kirby’s gang. Wait here, Dick. Wallace is downstairs. I’ll bring him up.”

In less than five minutes Ned returned with the old hunter at his heels.

“Whow!” exclaimed Wallace, sniffing the air of the warm room. “Smells like you fellers had been taking something. There’s a distinct odor of tangle-foot in this ‘ere atmosphere.”

“I fancied I smelt it myself,” nodded Dick; “but I assure you that we haven’t been taking anything, Mr. Wallace.”

“Not a drop,” substantiated Bryce. “Mr. Merriwell doesn’t drink, and I haven’t touched liquor in three months.”

“H’m!” grunted the old hunter. “Then somebody must have stepped in here for a snifter while you fellers was out. My nose don’t often fool me, and I swan it smells like a barroom hereabouts.”

Beneath the bed Tommy Nash clasped his hand over his mouth and tried to smother his breathing.

“As far as I’m concerned,” thought Tommy, “I certainly hate a man with such good smellers.”

“Zeb,” said Ned Bryce, “I’m in trouble and need some one I can rely on to help me out. I’ll pay you well if you will give me a lift.”

“What’s the trouble, boy? I thought you’d dodged trouble ruther slick the way you settled that business over at Simpson’s store.”

“But it isn’t settled.”

“Nope?”

“No, it isn’t settled. Kirby is determined to carry off this crew.”

“How does he propose to do it?”

Ned explained in full while Zeb Wallace wagged his jaw over a chew of tobacco and listened attentively.

“Now,” concluded Bryce, “if Smoke gets word to Kirby’s camps and brings out a bunch of men to hold up my crew I’ll be up against it unless I can fight him with his own weapons. There’s only one way for me to do it. I’m not sure that I can trust Britt. That’s a statement the privacy of which I wish you to respect, Zeb. I’ve got to stick by these men. I’ve got to take them in to the camps. On the road we’ll be pretty sure to run up against Kirby’s bunch. I want to get word to Hod Robbins. I want him to know the facts of the situation. I want him to bring out a hundred fighters ready for any sort of a clash. That’s where you come in, Zeb. Will you get word to Robbins?”

“Huh! When do you want me to start?”

“Sammy Smoke is on his way.”

“I’ll be ready to hit the tote road inside of ten minutes,” announced Zeb Wallace.

“Good!” cried Ned Bryce. “But look here, don’t
TIP TOP

let any one know about it. Get away without any one seeing you start if you can."

"All I need," said Wallace, "is my rifle and snowshoes and some crackers and cheese for breakfast. I can drop the gun and snowshoes out of my window, and I'll get the crackers and cheese over at Simpson's store."

When they had left the room Tommy Nash crawled forth from beneath the bed. His head was in a somewhat bewildered condition.

"There's lots of goings on," muttered the teamster, dragging himself to his feet and clinging fast to the footpost of the bed. "Mighty queer there don't nobody try to consult with me about these important matters. Kirby's going to carry us off bodily, is he? Well, I declare if that ain't interesting! Sammy Smoke is a-tearin' up the trail toward the Floodwood on the high gear. Old Zeb Wallace is going to pike out arter Sam directly. Some time in the near futur' there'll be a young war up yonder in the woods. I'm afeared of war. I don't like it. Folks is liable to get hurt when there's war. Such dangerous practices ought to be stopped. In this case the best way to stop it is to keep old Zeb from skyhooting off to Bryce's camp. Great reasoning, Tommy—great. You're mazingly sober. Tommy. You're s'prising sagacious, Tommy. Have a drink, Tommy. Thank ye. I don't care if I do."

With which he dragged forth the bottle from his bosom, uncorked it, tipped the bottom ceilingward, and closed his eyes while the remainder of the poison liquor gurgled down his throat.

The bottle emptied, Tommy tossed it onto the bed. "Now, what's best thing to do?" he questioned himself. "Lemme see. Britt he kicked me out into the cold. Bet he's never stuck his nose outside to see whether I was a-layin' out there stiff and froze or not. He must have been angry with me. They don't trust him, for I heard them say so. He don't know what's going on. Now, if I was to tell him mebbe he'd be pleased and overflowing with gratitude, and he wouldn't mind it so much if I be a-carryin' an awful load. If I don't say nothing to him and I'm ketchin' packing this load around, there's no telling what will happen. It sheems to me—hic!—that I've a sholemn duty before me to perform—I must tell Britt what's going on. I'll do sho without slightest delay."

He set forth upon his uncertain way in search of the crew boss.

CHAPTER IX.

OIL FOR THE HUMAN TONGUE.

"Gents," pleaded Tommy Nash, bracing his feet wide apart and swaying unsteadily as he stood in the middle of the big, smoky sitting room and looked vainly for the man he sought; "gents, I beseech you to kindly 'form me where I can find Mr. Britt. Got to find him right away instanter. Thash fact. P'rtant business."

"You've got a beat," laughed the man with the accordion. "You'd better not let Britt see you now."

Up from a corner jumped Ropaine, the little French-Canadian, his face ablaze.

"You teel!" he shrieked. "You steal my whisk! You get drunk on my whisk! I knock your head off!"

With a squawk of terror, Tommy turned and staggered blindly toward the door.

Ropaine was caught and held by some of the crew who knew something of the Frenchman's fiery temper and were aware that he always carried a wicked knife. He struggled with them, shrieking his malodictions at the thief, who fled unheedingly in order to escape and came to himself some minutes later in a snowbank which had drifted at one corner of the boarding house.

"Gracious shakes!" muttered Tommy. "Wonder how I got here? Shomebody wanted to hurt me. Now, I don't understand why anybody should want to hurt a peaceable, innochent, law-abiding citizen like Tommy Nash. It was that Canuck, Ropaine. He's bad, Ropaine is. He's dangerous character. He stabbed feller once. Why can't he be good feller and take a joke? What if I did drink a little of his booze? Didn't I need it? Didn't I have to have it? Hic! Sure I did. I'll buy him a quart when we come out in the spring. I was sick, and I needed
whisky. What's the stuff for, if a man can't have it when he's sick?

"Boo! it's cold out here. Why didn't I stay in that nice warm room? Why didn't I stay right where I wash under the bed? What made me change my location, anyhow? I can't seem to remember. Oh, yes, the boss wanted to shee me for somethin'. What made him want to shee me? I dunno. 'Portant business, but I dunno what 'tis. I can't stay out here, I'm sleepy, and if I try to sleep out here I'll catch death of cold. Mebbe I'll freeze. If I go back in house mebbe Ropaine will stick a knife in me. What am I going to do? Lemme shee. There's stable out behind house. Good place. Plenty of hay; hay good to sleep on. Crawl in hay, it's pretty warm; Great head, Tommy. Sthable for you. Come on. Come with me."

More by chance than anything else Tommy found his way to the stable; but at the door he lurched forward into the clutches of one of two men who had been holding a private consultation there. It happened that the man whom he reeled against was Ben Brit.

Britt's companion was Bob Kirby.

"What are you doing here, you soak?" exclaimed Britt, giving Tommy a shake. "Was you spying? Was you eavesdropping?"

"No, sir, mushing of kind," protested Tommy excitedly. "Been trying to find you. 'Portant business. I heard 'em fix it up. They're going to send old Zeb Wallace to ketch Smoke. If he don't ketch Smoke he'll git Robbins and lot of men to come out, and there'll be war. I don't like war. I'm peaceable man. I want to 'void war. Thash why I'm telling you."

"What's the fool saying, Britt?" exclaimed Kirby, in a low tone. "How did they know anything about Smoke?"

"Search me," mumbled Tommy. "I'm jesh giving plain facts, thash all. I 'spect old Zeb Wallace is off on the road by this time."

"He can't overtake Sammy Smoke," said Britt.

"But he can bring a bunch of Bryce's men out and block my play," said Kirby. "Perhaps this distillery is lying. Look here, you essence of a thousand bathrooms, if you're lying you'll get skinned alive! You tell us what you know and how you know it."

Tommy told everything as well as he could. He made them understand why he had hidden beneath the bed in the boarding house and what he had heard while concealed there.

"Likely Wallace is off by this time," said Kirby. "Look here, Britt, it's up to you to take care of this crew. I'm going to hit the trail. I'm going to follow Zeb Wallace. Got to stop him. I'll strip, the bells off the old cutter, and I'll have Wallace before he gets very far. I'll keep on and meet the boys as they're coming out."

"First," said Britt, "let me find out if Wallace has started. Wait here, Kirby."

He hastened into the house. Five minutes later he reappeared and stated that Wallace was certainly gone.

"All right," cried Kirby softly, "I'm off. So long; if you hold that bunch in hand and I land them at King Kirby's camps it means a hundred dollars in your fist and a better job than you've ever had before. I've got to have those papers, too. They're worth another hundred, at least, if you can get hold of them and turn them over to me. They may be worth a lot more than that."

Without another word Kirby started off at a run. After a few moments Britt, seemingly having entirely forgotten Tommy Nash, who was bracing hard against the barn to keep it from falling over, again hastened into the boarding house.

"Very kind of you, gents—very 'preciative," mumbled Tommy. "You certainly embarrass me with your thanks. Your gratitude was simply distressing. Hic! Whoa! Steady, old barn! Stop pushing! I'm ri' here. You can't push me down, so what's the use to try? Mehbe you don't like me? Mehbe you don't want me to sleep in your hay? Well, I won't. I don't like nobody that don't like me, not even if 'tis a barn. I'm going to take a little stroll by moonlight. I'm going to shing. I feel—hic!—feel like shingin' somethin' sentimental. Lemme shee. Lemme get my pucker up."
Staggering away, Tommy made several ineffectual efforts, but finally broke into song, and this is what he sang:

"Mid pleasure and palaces though we may roam,
Little brown jug I do love thee.
Oh, say, can you see the dawn's early light,
This is the year of jubilee.
For I was born in Bingen, fair Bingen on the Rhine,
Meet me by moonlight alone.
Bring back, bring back, bring back my Bonny to me,
Please father, dear father, come home."

Delighted over his performance, Tommy tickled himself in the ribs and laughed.

"I'm great shinger," he muttered. "Nothing makes me feel so happy as to shing. I'll stay out and shing all night jesh like a mockinggale. Where'm I going? Guess I'll go over and see old Simpson. Mebbe he's got little whisky he'll lemme have. Mebbe I can make him understand I'm shick man and need little whisky."

After a time Tommy staggered full and fair against the western wall of Simpson's store.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed. "What's matter, anyhow? What it is? Something in my way. Get out!"

He pushed hard, but the store refused to move the least bit.

"Thash all ri'," he grumbled resentfully. "You stay ri' where you be. I don't care. I'll go some other way."

But the moment he started to turn away he reeled, came round with a full swing, and brought up once more with a thud against the side of the building.

"Hello!" he spluttered, in surprise. "You here? Why, I thought you was 'round t'other side. How'd you get 'round here, anyway? Well, I guess I'll have to go some other direction."

But again, as he tried to detach himself from the building, he staggered in a short half circle and brought up against it with a thump.

"My goodness!" he exclaimed. "Whass this mean? There's three different directions, and every time I run slap up against a bare wall. There's only one av'me of 'scape left. I've got to try t'other direction."

So this time Tommy swung round to the left, but things were so unsteady beneath him that he made a turn like a spinning top and finally fell once more against the side of the building.

For fully a minute Tommy remained leaning against that wall, trying to understand what had happened to him. At length he began to sob.

"I can't get out," he moaned. "They've got me again. They've run me in, and lash time the judge said he'd gimme six months if I ever come up 'fore him again. I'm helpless prisoner. I'm poor, misguided, pitiful 'nebriate. That's what judge called me—'nebriate. 'N awful name to stick on anybody, but he called me that. I don't 'member when I was 'rested. I don't 'member when they had me in court lash time. Must have had 'n awful jag. But I'm sober now, and here I am in the jug for keeps."

And so, sobbing heartbrokenly, Tommy slumped down in the snow and lay there.

CHAPTER X.

THE MAIL CARRIER.

Sometime in the night Ben Britt was awakened by a knocking on the door of the room next to his. Lifting his head, he listened, and heard the boarding-house master telling young Bruce and Merriwell that Simpson wanted them to come over to his place at once. Britt wondered at this, and was tempted to rise for the purpose of investigating. Finally he decided to wait until Bryce should come back, and then ask questions. Eventually, however, he fell asleep and did not open his eyes again until the harsh clanging of the rising bell echoed through the building.

When the crew boss came downstairs the landlord met him with the announcement that he had a message from Henry Bryce's son.

"He says for you to stay right here with the crew until he gets back," said the landlord.

"Gits back?" exclaimed Britt, astonished. "Where's he gone?"

"Into the woods, taking t'other young feller along with him."


“Why in blazes——” began Britt.

“Last night,” explained the landlord, “Simpson sent over for young Bryce and his friend. It was long toward morning, but Simpson had me turn ’em out and send ’em across to his store. They found a man over there that Simpson’s girl had heard crying and talking to himself out in the snow long after she’d gone to bed. The voice of the man woke her up. She spoke to her father and told him somebody was out in the snow, and Simpson found Tommy Nash two-thirds froze. They worked over Tommy, and they’ve got him stowed in bed now, but it ain’t no ways certain Nash won’t lose both his hands. It was something he told them that made Simpson send for young Bryce.”

Britt swore like a trooper. Without delay he rushed out into the dull, heavy semi-darkness of a winter’s morning and made his way over to Simpson’s store, where he banged and kicked at the door until he was admitted.

“You’ve got one of my men here, I understand,” he said, as the storekeeper, half dressed, appeared.

“Yes, Nash is here in Bess’ bed,” was the answer. “She woke up and heard him taking on outside ’long toward morning. I dragged him in pretty near froze stiff, and we both worked over him the best we knew how. He’s asleep now. You’d better let him rest, Mr. Britt.”

“I’ve got to see him instantly!” snarled Britt. “I want to know what sort of talk he’s been making. I’m going to see him, Simpson.”

But the storekeeper’s daughter appeared at the head of the stairs and firmly declared:

“You can’t see him, Mr. Britt. Do you want to kill him, anyhow? Perhaps he will die, and if he doesn’t the chances are he will lose his hands. You’re to blame for that. He was one of your crew, and it’s your business to look after your men.”

“Don’t try to tell me my business!” rasped Britt, starting to ascend the stairs.

“And don’t you come another step nearer!” cried the girl, suddenly producing a pistol from behind her back and leveling it at Britt. “If you do I’ll shoot you, as sure as my name is Bess Simpson!”

He knew she meant it, and he stopped on the third stair. Then he tried to plead with her, but she ordered him out of the building at once, and finally, swearing in a tremendous rage, he yielded. As he retraced his steps toward the boarding house a few spits of snow struck his bearded cheek.

“Yah!” he cried. “She’s going to storm, and it’s liable to be a ripsnorter. If it is, them youngsters never will make Bryce’s camps. They’ll croak on the road.”

Ned and Dick had taken a light outfit, food for two meals, a pair of snowshoes each, and their rifles. When morning dawned they were many miles away on the tote road which led northwesterly into the Big Woods. Ned was hopeful of reaching his father’s lower camp on the Floodwood ere nightfall.

But with the dawn came the storm, which gradually grew thicker and heavier, the frozen flakes of snow sifting down through the interlaced branches of the trees with a faint tinkling sound. At times the wind roared amid the crowns, and the trees thrashed their limbs and groaned.

“Old fellow,” said Ned, “I’m afraid it’s going to set in for a fierce old storm. You had better turn back now. You can get back to Grindstone all right before the snow becomes deep enough to make disagreeable tramping. Even if it should get deep and heavy, you’ve got your snowshoes and you can stick to the road.”

“What are you talking about, Bryce?” exclaimed Dick, annoyed by Ned’s words. “Do you think I’m a squealer? Do you fancy I’m going to quit you now simply because there’s a storm setting in? We’ve started for your father’s lower camp, and I’m going to stick by you until we get there.”

“Perhaps we won’t get there. You never can tell. If this pans out to be a heavy storm we may stow our bones beneath the drifts.”

“Nonsense!” retorted Dick. “We’ve got a little food—which will carry us over two days or more with certain care. If we’re forced to it, we can make a brush camp somewhere in the pines or spruces, and,
with a fire going, we ought to be able to keep from freezing. We'll pull through all right."

Half an hour later they were surprised and startled to hear the faint tinkling of bells. Then ahead of them on the road appeared a single rig on runners. A buggy top had been arranged upon a sled, and the driver of the turnout was comfortably fixed and well protected with heavy clothes and robes.

"It's Curry, the mail carrier," cried Ned. "He's a man I want to see."

The mail carrier drew up, leaning forward to peer at the two young men in surprise.

"What in thunder are you fellers doing?" he cried. "Where you think you're going in this storm? You better turn your noses toward Grindstone."

"Hello, Curry," called Ned. "We're bound for my father's lower camp."

"You'll never make it, Mr. Bryce. Grindstone is a heap nearer."

"I've got to make it. It's absolutely imperative. You must have come through in the night?"

"Yea; saw she was likely to storm, and started right arter supper last night."

"Did you meet any one?"

"Met two men on horses sometime in the night. Dunno what time it was, for I didn't git my watch out. I spoke to them, but they never answered. They rid right past, and kept on."

"You didn't meet any one before you met those two men?"

"No, sir, never saw a soul. I've been wondering who they was."

Ned and Dick knew the horsemen were Kirby and Hunker, but it seemed somewhat remarkable that Curry had seen nothing of Sammy Smoke or Zeb Wallace. After a little, however, Bryce decided that both the Indian and the old hunter would hear the tinkle of the mail carrier's bells, and it might be that, not wishing to be seen, they would step into the road-side thickets and remain until the men passed them.

"I've got to git down to Grindstone and report," said Curry, in a troubled way. "That's why I decided to make it in the night. I'm up against it."

"Yes."

"How?"

"Well, I either lost a mail sack at Kirby's camp when on my last trip or it was stole from me. I've done my best to find out what's become of it, but I can't get a trace of the thing."

Ned Bryce put out his hand and grasped his companion's arm.

"There!" he breathed. "Now I believe I know why Robbins failed to get down to Grindstone. He never got the governor's letter. Kirby got hold of it himself, and so he was on hand at Grindstone."

"Got to be moving along," said Curry. "This storm is thickening. It'll be hard going before I get to Grindstone now. Don't you cal'late you fellers better come back with me?"

"No," said Bryce, "we're going to keep on."

"Well, you'll never reach your old man's lower camp till this smudge lets up. You might git as fur as the old Spring Brook Camps, but they're off the main road three miles. If you find you can't push through you'd better make for them camps and hang up there."

"Thanks, Curry," said Bryce. "If we can't get any farther perhaps we'll take your advice."

The mail carrier clucked to his horse and went on, with a musical tinkling of bells which gradually grew fainter and finally died out in the distance.

CHAPTER XI.

AT LANGLEY'S CROSSING.

Panting, exhausted, and buffeted by the storm, the two youths finally reached the old Spring Brook Camps. One of the old camps was in fairly good condition. The door still hung on its rusty hinges, and there was some glass left in the broken windows. In one corner, near the fireplace, there was a pile of wood, and, having found a broken shovel and shoveled out the snow so that the door could be closed, they proceeded to start a fire.

"Well, this is an adventure!" cried Dick. "Here we are, Bryce, old man, snowed in. We won't freeze as long as that pile of wood lasts. If we had plenty
of provisions we'd be comfortable enough, for it will be no hard task to stop the gaps in these windows."

Beneath one of the bunks a roll of tarred paper was discovered. Several thicknesses of this tacked over a broken window pane was sufficient to shut out a great deal of the cold, as well as much of the light. However, with that royal blaze roaring on the hearth, it was fairly cheerful in the camp.

The wind had risen, and it roared and volleyed amid the great trees. Snow beat upon the patched windows and drifted around the camp.

At times the clamor without sunk into sudden and unexpected silence. Then again it would burst forth with groanings and roaring in the distance. The whole forest seemed to break forth into the wildest excitement beneath the breath of the storm wind. The trees clashed their bare limbs together with the rattling sound of irregular musketry. The tempest amid the crowds sounded like cannonading. Even the old camp cracked and shivered beneath the blows of those tremendous blasts.

"Well, it isn't so bad," confessed Bryce, as he put out his bare hands to the blaze and warmed them. "I'm afraid we would have fared pretty rough if we'd attempted to knock together any sort of a brush camp out in the woods. Here we'll get along first-rate. But I'm sorry we're held up. I'm sorry we couldn't get through without delay and deliver the papers. Anyhow, it isn't likely Sammy Smoke will get any of Kirby's men to leave camp in this storm, and our crew is safe down at Grindstone."

They ate sparingly of their provisions, and when the whole camp had become well warmed, having talked things over until there seemed little more to say, they finally fell asleep, Dick on the "deacon's seat" and Bryce on the old boughs of a bunk near the fireplace.

When they awoke it was pitch dark without and the wind was still roaring, although it seemed that the snow was not falling as heavily. Investigation outside proved that this was true, but with the let-up in the snowfall the tempest actually seemed to increase.

They ate a decidedly frugal supper, and arranged to keep the fire going through the night, not having blankets, which were needed to keep them warm if the blaze died down.

Dick rose four or five times to replenish the fire, and each time he listened with a certain feeling of awe to the voice of the wind in the Big Woods. Toward morning the wind slowly abated, and at dawn it died down completely.

"Well, it isn't so worse, after all," cried Ned, when they had flung open the camp door and looked out upon the winter woods. "We'll have to use snowshoes, but we can plug along with them, all right."

"Hark!" cried Dick.

From far away in the woods came the faint report of a gun.

"What do you know about that!" exclaimed Merriwell. "Who's shooting in this vicinity at this hour after such a night?"

"Ask me," ejaculated Bryce. "Are you sure it was a gun shot?"

"That was the report of a rifle, beyond question."

"Well, I'm guessing," Ned admitted.

They listened for a while, but heard nothing more. Dick brought forth his snowshoes and prepared to give them a trial.

"In order to see how I can handle them," he said; "then we'll have breakfast and be off."

He was twenty feet from the door when Bryce called to him, and urged him to listen again.

They heard a dismal howling, faint and far away to the westward. Almost immediately the cry was answered by a similar howl farther to the north. Then it was taken up in still another direction.

"It's been three years, at least," said Dick, "since I've heard wolves."

"That's what they are!" cried Ned, with some excitement. "I don't think we'd better be in a hurry about starting out."

"It isn't often they will attack a human being," said Dick.

"They will when desperate with hunger, and unless they were desperate you'd not hear from them this morning, following that storm. Whoever it was fired that shot, he'd better look out."
At intervals the howling of the wolves continued. Dick knew the creatures were signaling to one another. He knew they were being called by a leader, who had plainly announced his discovery of something that would serve them as a meal, and the fact that they had been called at all indicated it was a living creature which no single wolf cared to attack.

Merriwell and Bryce were eating breakfast, pausing now and then to listen to a wolf cry, when they again heard the report of a rifle. This time it sounded much nearer.

Bryce sprang up at once.

"Dick," he said, "I've got a notion that some person is being followed by those wolves. He's shooting at them."

"Knowing the habits of wolves," said Dick, "I'm doubtful."

"Then what's your explanation?"

"Are there deer in these woods?"

"Yes, plenty of them."

"Then it's possible we've heard a deer hunter shooting. It's quite likely that the wolves have scented blood and are clamorous to get at the game the hunter has brought down."

"Anyhow, they're coming this way. By George! I hear that?"

Two rifle shots sounded close together. A moment later there was a tremendous uproar from the wolves, the sound seemingly coming from almost the same point as the shots.

"Ned," said Dick, "I am suddenly inclined to change my mind. I'm tempted to believe that you're right. Some one is in trouble out there."

Seizing his own rifle, Dick hurried to the door, turning the muzzle skyward and discharging two shots.

"That will let him know there's some one else near," he said, as he made hasty preparations to go out.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going out there and take a hand in the fun."

"The fun! Don't you think it's so much fun with a pack of hungry wolves snarling at your heels."

Merriwell did not tell his friend that he had fought wolves and animals many times more dangerous ere he entered prep school at Fardale. He lost no time in getting out on his snowshoes, and, seeing he was determined, Bryce prepared to follow.

The wolves were now not far away, and again the unknown man was heard shooting.

With his rifle ready for use, Merriwell set out at a run. The man who can manipulate snowshoes and run on them is an expert. This Dick did, to the amazement of Bryce, who finally started after him as he disappeared in the thickets.

Not much more than a quarter of a mile did Dick cover before he plunged into a thicket and heard the wolves snarling near at hand. By the sound he judged that the animals had their prey cornered. One shot more was fired, and then Dick, thrusting himself through the brush, came into a clearing and beheld a thrilling spectacle. Old Zeb Wallace was there, beset by the hungry wolves. A rifle emptied, but with the last shell jammed in it, the old hunter could not refill the magazine. Seeming to realize that their time had come, the wolves closed in on him. He clubbed his rifle to beat off the snarling beasts.

At this juncture Merriwell began firing. He wasted no bullets, and in a few seconds four or five of the wolves were kicking in their death throes upon the blood-stained snow at the feet of Zeb Wallace. At first the companions of the dying beasts were inclined to leap upon the bullet-stricken ones and tear them to pieces, so fierce was their hunger. But as the rain of lead continued the remainder of the attacking pack turned and scattered, disappearing like flitting shadows into the timber.

"I'm certainly much obliged, young man," said Wallace, as he produced a plug of tobacco from the side pocket of his skin coat and bit off a chew. "This yere old rifle played me a dirty trick. If it hadn't been for you turning up now just as you done, mebbe them critters would be picking my bones by this time. They certain was monstrous ravenous."

Ned Bryce came crashing through the thicket and halted.
"Too late, Ned," laughed Dick. "You can't get into the sport."

"I was trying to make the old Spring Brook Camps," explained Wallace. "Thought mebbe I could stand the critters off there. I cal'late it was you boys I heard firing them two shots a short time ago. It's rather unexpected, a-finding you hereabouts jest now. I struck five of Hen Bryce's men at Kee-ver Crick, cutting corduroy, and I sent them arter Robbins and the crew while I turned back to Grindstone. This yere storm ketched me, and I had to squat under a brush lean-to last night. Mighty cold it was, too. The wolves sorter smelled me out before morning. What you doing here, anyhow?"

"Come back to Spring Brook and we'll tell you-all about it, Zeb," said Ned.

* * * * * * *

Hod Robbins, with forty-five men, and Cole Archer, with nearly as many more, blocked the road at Langley's Crossing when Bob Kirby attempted to come down on the way to Grindstone. Kirby was amazed and disgusted to find them there.

A parley followed, during which Robbins told Kirby he might as well turn around and go back about his business.

And while that parley was taking place, Zeb Wallace, Ned Bryce, and Dick Merriwell put in an appearance.

Kirby realized that he was completely outwitted and beaten. Before his eyes he saw young Bryce deliver the papers he coveted into the hands of Robbins.

Kirby relieved his feelings by profanity. He was still swearing when Ben Brit, followed by the crew from Grindstone, came down the trail toward Langley's Crossing.

And behind the crew, who were breaking the road, came the mail carrier, with Bess Simpson on the sled beside him.

Britt paused falteringingly as he recognized Robbins and the Bryce crew. There was no chance to back out, however, and he came forward looking decidedly sullen and crestfallen.

Cole Archer stepped behind a spruce as Bess Simpson sprang off the mail carrier's sled.

"Britt," cried Ned Bryce, "come forward."

The crew boss advanced reluctantly.

"I don't care to have any more dealings with a man like you, Britt," said Ned. "There's your master over yonder. You had better join Kirby. You won't be missed. The rest of these boys will stick by me."

"Ay tank that's all right, Meester Bryce," said Olsen, the Swede. "Ay tank you depend on us."

With a sneer, Britt strode away to join Kirby's crew.

"I didn't mean for him to turn your men over to Bob Kirby, Mr. Bryce," cried Bess Simpson. "That's one reason why I came along against my father's wishes. I induced Curry to bring me, and we stuck by the crew. Then I was afraid something might have happened to you in that storm."

Cole Archer listened in astonishment. Suddenly his face, which had paled at sight of the girl, flushed and flamed, and his lips parted in a grin of satisfaction.

"Miss Simpson," said Bryce, "I owe you a great deal. Only for you and my friend Merriwell I think Kirby would have succeeded in his treacherous design."

Bess Simpson frankly offered Dick her hand.

"I'm glad you pulled through that storm all right," she said. "After seeing you whip Kirby's bully, Hunker, it would have broke me up if you'd been froze stiff up here in the woods. I reckon Bob Kirby has found out that he ain't the whole shooting match in these parts."

Cole Archer strode forward.

"Bess!" he called, his voice trembling the least bit. With a cry, she turned and saw him. Then she sprang forward, both hands outstretched, her cheeks suffused, and her eyes full of happiness.

"Oh, Cole!" she exclaimed. "You don't know how glad I am to see you!"

THE END.

Look on the next page, first column, and you will find some news to please you about a new series of Merriwell stories that will begin with the next number (716).
GOOD NEWS ABOUT FRANK MERRIWEEL.

It is a great pleasure to tell you this bit of news—just received from your favorite author, Burt L. Standish:

Frank Merriwel, a while ago, set off for Mexico, where he arrived without mishap, and is there now in the thick of adventures as unexpected as they are stirring, to put it very mildly.

That's good news all right, you say. But wait until you get the details in a story that will appear in the next number of "Tip Top" (716).

It is years since Merris's first visit to Mexico—that land of china-blue skies, waving palm tree, dark-eyed señoritas, and swaggering señor. Among the latter—many of you will remember—were the sort of chaps in whom he was obliged to put a crimp now and then. Well, he hasn't found the country changed much in that respect, as you will see when you read next week's story—"Frank Merriwel's Fairness; or, The Crime of a Nation."

Merry—needless to remind you Tip-Toppers—never yet went about with a chip on his shoulder. He is hunting something very interesting in Mexico, but it is not trouble. Nevertheless, he has run into some, and all because his manly instincts will not let him stand idly by and see a big wrong done to a little fellow.

It is a friendly Mexican boy who kindles Frank's sympathy, and is the innocent means of getting him into a bad mix-up with the grafting officials of a certain province. And it looks as if big-hearted Merry is going to have the time of his life before he accomplishes the purpose that has called him to Mexico.

That he will pull through in good shape, you all will hope, for Frank has work to do that will take him farther south—to Central America, and still farther, to South America itself. And the deeper he pushes into the region of his new fortunes the more stories you will have about him, told as only Mr. Standish knows how to tell them.

Frank is not alone now, and is not likely to be as he goes on. When he left Bloomfield, and put Bart Hodge in charge of the school, he took along a companion who is one of the most amusing chaps you ever met. He is sure to give you many a hearty laugh. The author describes him as "a tall, lank, good-natured New Englander by the name of Joshua Crane."

Judging from the excellent account in fighting which Joshua has given of himself in the first story, he is likely to be with Merry—alive and kicking, "by Jiminy Hocuspocus!"—to the end.

Here is a guess that will look good to you, as it certainly does to us. It is that several of the boys who have been your favorites in the Merriwel stories will join Frank sooner or later, and share his new fortunes, be they good or bad, in whatever part of Central or South America duty may call him.

No one need tell you how good the Merriwel tales have been—your letters to "Tip Top" are the best words on that subject; but it is worth while to remind you that with this new lot they are going to be better than ever.

Make sure to be in at the beginning, and get No. 716 of "Tip Top," which will contain the first of this new series of Merriwel tales.

ALL "TIP TOP" LETTERS REAL.

I write you a few lines to tell you how I like "Tip Top." I have read nearly all the other weeklies, but they do not come up to "Tip Top." I have been reading "Tip Top" six years steadily, yet my opinion of it does not change. Of the boys I like Frank, Dick, Bart, Badger, Higgins, Gallup, Tommy Tucker—the one who doesn't like ants—Brad, Old Joe, Young Joe, Sparkfark, Chet. Of the girls I like Inza, Doris, Ethel, June, Felicia, Belle Bramble, and Rose Sharon. Please print this letter, so that the boys of Ottawa will believe that the letters in the Applause column are real letters and not fakes, as they think. Yours very truly,

Ottawa, Canada. L. LACHANCE.

All the letters published in this weekly are genuine. Thousands and thousands of boys know this, but here and there is one who, for some mysterious reason, thinks that we make up these letters from week to week. The definite address of the writer is seldom printed, because that is given to us in confidence.

AMERICAN COLLEGE YELLS.

Here are some of the college cheers which you were told would be published in this number.

They are given in response to many inquiries by "Tip Top" readers as to what is the yell of this, that, or the other college.

The collection—probably the most extensive one ever made—is presented in three parts—one part appearing each week.

PART III.


University of Chicago—"Chicago, Chicago, Chicago! Go! Go! Go! Chica-go, Chica-go!"

Univ. of Cincinnati—"Heila, Heila, Heilasgan! Heila, Heila, Hal! Cincinnati Varsity, Rah! Rah! Rah!"

University of Colorado—"Colorado, Rado, 'Rado (nine rahs), 'Rado, 'Rado, Colorado, 'Rado, 'Rado, Carbonado!"

University of Denver—"U, U, U, O of D, Den-ver, Ver-si-ty! Kais-ker Wa-loo Zpi boom—D, U!"

Univ. of Georgia—"Hoo-rah, Rah, Hoo, Rah, Rah, Rah, Georgia!"

University of Idaho—"Rah! Rah! Rah! (twice) Idaho! Id-s-ho! Boom! Bay! Bah!"

University of Illinois—"Hol-a-ba-loo, rah! rah! Hol-a-ba-loo! rah! rah! Hoo-raah! Hoo-raah! Illinois! Wah! Wah!"
University of Kansas.—"Rock-Chalk! Jay-Hawk! K. U. !"

University of Maine.—"Rah, rah, rah; Rah, rah, rah; Rah, rah, Maine!

University of Michigan.—"U. of M. rah! rah! (repeat) Hoo-rah! Hoo-rah! Michigan! rah! rah! rah!"

University of Minnesota.—"Rah, rah, rah, Ski-U-mah—hoorah—hoo-rah-ka-ku-ka!"

University of Missouri.—"Rah! Rah! Missourie M. U.-ni-ver-si-ty, Hurrah! Hirah yes, sirce!"

University of Montana.—"Montana, Montana, Zip boom bah, Rah, Rah, Rah, Zip!"

University of Nevada.—"Rickety ix, Ski ix, Ski ix, Rah Rah! Rah! Rickety ix, Ski ix, Ski ix, Rah Ha Ha, Nashville!"

University of Nebraska.—"U-U-Uni Ver Vers-Nebraska, N-E. Bras-Ki Oh, oh My!"

University of North Carolina.—"Yackety yack Hooray! Hooray! (twice) Carolina Varsity Boom Rah, Boom Rah, Car-o-li-na!"

University of North Dakota.—"Odo-do-do! Ri-ri-ri! By-al! By-al! North Dakota!" (and Sioux war cry.)

University of Notre Dame.—"U. N. D. rah, rah rah rah! U. N. D. rah rah rah; hoorah, hoorah, U. N. D. rah rah rah!"

University of Oklahoma.—"Hi! Rickety Whoop-too do boomer, sooner, okla. U!"

University of Oregon.—"Rah Rah Rah! Rah Rah Rah! Rah Oregon!"

University of Pennsylvania.—"Hoo-rah! Hoo-rah! Penn-syl-va-ni-a!"

University of Rochester.—"Hoi, Hoi, Hoi, Rah, Rah, Rah! (3 times) Rochester! Rochester! Rochester!"

University of Southern California.—"Racketly! Hackety Wah! Whoo wah! (repeat) zip! Boom! Bah! (repeat) U. S. C! Rah! Rah! Rah!"

University of Tennessee.—"U. of T! Rah! rah! (twice) Hurrah! Hur-rah Tennessee! Tennessee! Rah! rah! rah!"

University of Texas.—"Roll, roll, roll, Hoolahah! Hooray! Hooray! (twice) Hooray! Hooray! Varsity! Varsity! U. T. A!"

University of the Pacific.—"Hoo! Hoo! Old U. P. P-a-c-i-f-i-c, University!"

University of the South.—"Rah! Rah! Reel! Var-si-Tee, Hey, up! Hey, up! St-Wa-Nee! Sew-anee, Rah! Se-Wa-Nee, Sew-anee, TIGER, S-a-s-s, Boom! Ah!"

University of Utah.—"Rah, Rah, Rah! (three times) Utah!"

University of Vermont.—"Rah, rah, rah, rah, rah, rah, rah! Vermont, Vermont, Vermont! rah! rah!"

University of Virginia.—"Wah! hoo! wah! Wah! hoo! wah! U-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v-Va-v
No one answered the third voice. Once more the witchery of the night, assisted by the magic influence of awakened memories, overcame all desire for sociability, and quiet settled again upon the group. One by one the glowing cigar ends went out. Then softly a window opened on the roof over the piazza; a muffled object rolled down and struck the sod with a soft thud. Immediately a small pair of legs dangled before the astonished views of the owners of the voices.

"Hurry up, Sam," whispered a high-pitched voice huskily. "The old gent's not in the library, and I don't know where he is. I've got the lunch and the plug and the new number. All you've got to bring is the slicker and the keys to the locker. Can't you manage that, you ninnies? We ought to go farther to-night than we've gone any night this week. Get a move on!"

Just then two hands belonging to the owner of the third voice grasped the two dangling ankles.

"James Van Killingsford Waters, you and your brother go upstairs to bed, and you needn't leave your room all day today. I myself shall see that you do not. Do you understand?"

After the legs had scrambled upward again and the window overhand had been noiselessly lowered, the first voice spoke once more:

"Why didn't you let them alone, Waters? They would never have known that you knew."

The third voice did not reply at once. When it did it said:

"I wonder why in thunder I didn't?"

THEY DIDN'T GET THE JOB.

This is what happened to seventy-five replies to an advertisement for an office boy. The man who advertised was a New York City banker.

He undertook to select the boy needed in his office by examining the written applications and the references given. When the seventy-five answers came he first tossed the twenty postcards unread into the waste-basket. "This job," he said, "is worth more than a postcard to the boy who gets it."

Of the fifty-five remaining letters twelve had evidently been hurriedly scribbled in the office of the newspaper which printed the advertisement. All twelve followed the postcards into the basket. There remained forty-three.

Two of these papers were addressed to the editor. The name on each of these papers was that of a pensieman.

Eighteen were disqualified on that score.

The remarks of the banker as he rejected the eighteen were illuminating.

"An office boy must write a plain, easily readable hand. Only a genius can adopt bad pensmanship as a mark of his individuality."

"Futility spelling barred ten more of the applicants. "Business man" said the first, "this is the kind of spelling found in dictionaries. They cannot countenance or promote reforms, much needed as they may be, in their business correspondence."

Four letters were not considered because the writers had worded them like telegrams. One of these said: "Just saw your ad. Offer my services. Am eighteen. Can call to-morrow."

He was not invited to call, for, although economy is a virtue worth practicing, it is misplaced when applied to words in an application for a position. Such a note savors of impudence, or at least of pertness.

The advertisement called for two references. In only three letters which passed the other tests had this requirement been remembered, so the selection narrowed itself down to these.

Of the three writers, only one showed that he understood something of typewriting. He had been graduated from the grammar school, had taken up commercial work in an evening school, and had rented a typewriting machine, so as to fit himself for office work. This boy received a notice to appear at the bank's office.

ANYTHING TO SUIT HIM.

Visitor—at country hotel: "Here, I say, what do you call this stuff?"

Landlord: "Butter."

Visitor: "Butter! Why I'd rather eat axle grease than this awful stuff."

Landlord: "John, run out to the barn and get some axle grease for the gentleman."
Dick, Bart, Brad, Hal Darrell, Elsie, Inza, June, Doris. I always look forward for Friday to come-see that day “Tip Top” reaches the house, and I am sorry when it is gone. I remain a loyal Tip-Topper.

Elkin, N. C.

Joe Fegram.

Lively Tales of Adventure.

Some time ago a friend advised me to read one of your “Tip Top Weeklies,” and I want to say that I never before read a more lively, interesting, red-blooded tale of adventure. It kept it has promoted a clear, healthy, and fair-minded spirit with me and among my numerous friends to whom I have recommended it. I hope to be able to show many more of my acquaintances what is being by not reading “Tip Top.”

Yonkers, N. Y.

J. McNamara.

Doesn’t Give Running-away Ideas.

I like to read the “Tip Top Weekly” because it does not get ideas into your head about running away from home. Dick Merriwell is a fellow of intelligence; that is why I like to read about him. I have learned a good deal about baseball and football from this weekly, and I wish everybody would read the “Tip Top.”

Upton, Mass.

Ernest Childs.

Your Tribute a Glowing One.

I have read a couple of hundred copies of “Tip Top Weekly” and I have received Frank and Dick Merriwell stories, and I think it is the best American publication for a boy to read ever printed. The characters in these books are explained so thoroughly that you feel as if you are personally acquainted with them. Every spare minute I can spare I read one of these books. Some people seem to think these weeklies are injurious to a boy’s mind, but I know better. Whenever I meet any persons that are inclined to think these weeklies are injurious I ask them to read one. I have succeeded in getting four boys to read the “Tip Top Weekly,” and hope to convert more boys to read it. This weekly has opened my eyes to a lot of things that are really injurious. I am much obliged if you will send me the picture postal cards of the principal characters in the “Tip Top Weekly.” I propose three hearty cheers for the author of the most beneficial book ever printed. And also three long cheers for Frank and Dick Merriwell. Yours respectfully.


Harry Houston.

Your Appreciation Valued Highly.

Am about to submit my reasons for liking the Merriwell stories. The principal reason is, that Mr. Stansdich carries a moral through his pages without giving it sermon-like prominence. Another reason is, there is a buoyant wholesomeness in his characters; one can readily appreciate the rough friendship of Brad Buckhart and his undying loyalty. Such qualities are true to life in instances of my own observation. Although the stories of Frank and Dick Merriwell are not to get the best, I like them all. Being a lover of the woods and open country, I could sympathize with Dick when he first felt the crowding opposition of the scrapers.

P. F. Woodford.

Chicago, Ill.

Reading for All the Family.

Being a constant reader of “Tip Top” for the past two years, I take the liberty of writing you my opinion of it. I not only regard it as the best boys’ weekly, but a weekly that all the family should enjoy reading. I not only enjoy reading it myself, but I have got most of my boy friends to do so, and they all are of the same opinion as myself. Wishing Burt L. Street & Smith, and the rest of the “Tip-Toppers” long and prosperous lives, I remain,

William W. Tulley.

Boston, Mass.

Guided Him On Road to Manhood.

I have read grand old “Tip Top” for a long time, and I like it because it has good, wholesome athletic stories, and teaches a boy a good deal. The plots are well formed and carried out. I like it also because it gives good college and Western stories. Mr. Stansdich writes a game so well that you imagine you are there looking on. “Tip Top” shows a boy the bad effect of narcotics and liquors, and points out the evil result to the user of them. The “Tip Top” has done much toward changing me from a weak boy to a strong one. I have got quite a number of my friends to read it. I am a man now, but still read good old “Tip Top,” and like it just the same. Please send me the postals of the leading characters in “Tip Top.” Frank is my favorite of all; then comes Dick, Bart, Brad, Browning, Jack Diamond. How is Teddy Smart? All O. K. I think Chester Arlington is a fine character, as he shows the way men and boys will let their passions run away with them. I hope “Tip Top” will always be the king of weeklies.

Baltimore, Md.

Frank Russell.

Your Testimonial c Splendid One.

Having read dear old “Tip Top” for a number of years, I want to tell you what it has done to me. In the first place it has made a man out of me. I did not take any exercise, felt lazy; did not care for sports, and only cared to lie down and read some novel. One day, having purchased some books, I found a “Tip Top” among them. Being curious to see what kind of a story it was, I read it first. Well, say, make out that didn’t interest me! I took it to the table and read it while eating my lunch. My only regret was that it was the only one I had, but I soon laid in a supply of “Tip Tops,” and have read them ever since. I have got some of my friends to read them, and they say they cannot do without them. Please send me the set of postals so that I may look upon my ideal in life, Dick Merriwell. Thankfully yours,

Leslie Devroyo.

His Mother Objected at First.

This is my first letter to you, and I hope it will not be the last. I have just finished reading No. 369—Dick Merriwell’s Gym,—and I think it is fine. Every Friday I wait at the bookstore until “Tip Top” arrives. My mother at first objected to my reading “Tip Top,” but I gave her No. 665 to read, and now she always gives me the money to get it with. I remain your obedient servant,

Red Oak, Ia.

Harold Tachnouer.

Success to Your “Tip Top” Club.

I have been reading “Tip Tops” for about a year. I read many Alger books. Some of the boys persuaded me to read the “Tip Tops.” I read one, and I liked it, and I have read them since. We have formed a club, and Wilbur, one of our members, just started, and we expect to have thirty members by Christmas. I like Dick, Frank, Bart Hodge, Brad Buckhart, Joe Crowfoot, and many others. I have read many weeklies, but not any of them are equal to the “Tip Top.” I have got most of the Merriwells in the New Medal Library. I have seen many of these postal-card sets, and think they are fine. I would be glad if you would send me some.

Evansville, Ind.

Claude Wertz.

TIP TOP ROLL OF HONOR.

Following the suggestion of Mr. Burt L. Stansdich, that appeared in his letter to Tip Top readers in No. 480, the following loyal Tip Toppers have won for themselves a place on our Honor Roll for their efforts to increase the circulation of the King of Weeklies. Get in, boys and girls, and strive to have your name at the head of the list.

L. Lachance, Ottawa, Canada.
A. Pleitner, Washington, D. C.
W. O. Stiverson, 441 South State Street, Monticello, Ill.
Frank Russell, Baltimore, Md.
J. McNamara, Yonkers, N. Y.
Orville Sandefur, Indianapolis, Ind.
C. A. Hoyt, Toledo, Ohio.
Ada Evans, 55 Paul Avenue, Pittsburg, Pa.

The names of other enthusiastic Tip Toppers will be added from time to time. Send in the result of your efforts to push the circulation of your favorite weekly and win a place on the Roll of Honor.

FREE POST CARDS—They will be sent to you if you tell us: Why you like Tip Top; what it has done to help you; what you are doing to help others by getting them to take Tip Top every week. Do this, and you will receive by mail a set of six colored post cards with lite-like pictures of the principal characters in the Merriwell stories. Address your letters, "Street & Smith, 72-79 Seventh Avenue, New York City," and write in one corner of the envelope, "Tip Top Post Card Offer."
TIP TOP WEEKLY.

Talks with your chum
By Prof. Fourmen

So many inquiries reach us from week to week concerning the various manuals on athletic development, which we publish, that we have decided to keep a list of them standing here. Any number can be had by mail by remitting 10 cents, and 3 cents postage, for each copy, to the publishers.

Frank Merriwell’s Book of Physical Development.
The Art of Boxing and Self-defense, by Prof. Donovan.
U. S. Army Physical Exercises, revised by Prof. Donovan.
Physical Health Culture, by Prof. Fourmen.

Prof. Fourmen: I have been reading “Tip Top Weekly” for three years, and would like to ask your advice on the following: I am 17 years 6 months old, and weigh only 110 pounds; 5 feet 5 inches. Now, what I would like to know is, how can I increase my weight about 15 pounds or more? I take simple exercise and deep breathing; but that don’t seem to help any, although I have a good-sized chest.

New York City.

Abraham Levy.

You don’t give your chest measurement, so I cannot tell whether you are up to the average in that respect. Deep breathing will not put weight on you except as it may strengthen the lungs and your general physical condition as a result. You need a course of dieting—a systematic consumption of the most nourishing foods you can obtain, as well as some that have fat-making properties, if you would capture those fifteen pounds.

Prof. Fourmen: Being a reader of “Tip Top” for some time, I take the liberty of asking you a few questions. My age is 15 years; weight, 125 pounds; height, 5 feet 5 inches; chest, normal, 33 3/4 inches; expanded, 34 3/4 inches; biceps, normal, 9 3/4 inches; expanded, 11 1/8 inches; neck, 14 1/2 inches; shoulders, 16 inches; wrist, 7 inches; thigh, 20 inches; calves, 13 1/2 inches; ankle, 9 inches; waist, 27 7/16 inches; hips, 32 3/4 inches. Would I make a boxer or wrestler? If I have any weak points please tell me how I can develop them.

Andrew J. Witherspoon.

New Orleans, La.

You are about 5 pounds too heavy, although you are one of the stockily built chaps. It wouldn’t hurt you at all as a boxer or even a wrestler to get off a little weight, although you seem to be in fair shape for either sport.

Prof. Fourmen: Having read the "Tip Top” for six years, I take the liberty to give my measurements. Height, 5 feet 9 1/2 inches; weight, 130 pounds; age, 17 years; chest, normal, 32 inches; expanded, 34 3/4 inches; neck, 13 3/4 inches; elbows, 13 1/2 inches; thigh, 18 1/4 inches; across shoulders, 18 inches; waist, 33 inches; forearm, 10 inches; biceps, 11 inches. Does punching the bag make the arm strong?

Daniel Durham.

Boston, Mass.

You are too light in weight, too small around the chest, too large at the waist. There’s development work ahead of you, chum Daniel. Get busy.

Prof. Fourmen: Having been a constant reader of the great “Tip Top Weekly,” I would like you to tell me what you think of my measurements. Age, 16 years; weight, 127 pounds, with clothes on; height, 5 feet 7 inches; neck, 13 3/4 inches; chest, normal, 30 inches; expanded, 31 3/4 inches; thigh, 18 inches; waist, 26 7/16 inches; reach, 30 inches; calf, 12 3/4 inches; forearm, 9 1/2 inches. I play baseball, football, basketball, row, swim, and run. Do you think I can become an athlete? Please instruct me how I can better myself. Thanking you in advance, I remain a friend of the “Tip Top Weekly.”

Deacon.


The only part of you which, by the figures given, reaches the measurement that ought to go with your height is the waist; and here you are 2 inches to the bad; that is, you measure 2 inches too much. You need a steady course in physical development. Get a copy of Frank Merriwell’s book on the subject; study it, and follow the advice it contains.

Prof. Fourmen: I have read the “Tip Top Weekly” for the last three years, and think it is great. Here are my measurements: Weight, 129 pounds; age, 16 years; height, 5 feet 7 inches; chest, normal, 34 inches; expanded, 34 inches; contracted, 30 inches; waist, 20 inches; neck, 14 inches; thigh, 20 inches; calves, 14 inches; biceps, 13 inches; forearm, 10 inches; around shoulders, 30 inches; ankles, 10 inches; wrist, 7 inches. Have I any strong points, and what are they? What are my weak points, and how can I develop them? How are my measurements compared with other boys of my age? What pound diet should I use? I have not taken up exercise yet, in any form, except baseball. Do you think I can become an all-around athlete?

Girardville, Pa.

A loyal Tip-Topper.

You have good points and bad. One good point is that your height is fair for a boy of your age; your thighs measure up to the standard, as do your calves. On chest measurement you are shy; you ought to have about 5 inches more there. You could lose an inch or so of waist and be better off. Your measurements compare very well with boys of your age, save in the matter of chest. Bring that up nearer the mark by bell-bending at first, and increase the weight of the bells by degrees. A course in breathing, too, is needed. Be a glutton on fresh air. Persevere; cultivate good habits, and you may reach the athletic standard.

Prof. Fourmen: During my nineteen years of life I have read many weeklies, but I find that whatever kind of a story I read that the good old “Tip Top” is the best of them all. I have bound my copies of “Tip Top,” and have done many other things to interest my friends in the weekly, and after reading a few of them they all say that they are fine. I now take the liberty to ask a few questions. My age is 19 years; weight, 150 pounds; height, 5 feet 8 1/2 inches; I weigh 172 pounds; waist, 34 inches; chest, normal, 30 inches; I am 20 inches across my shoulders; neck, 15 inches; calves, 15 inches; my wrist, 6 3/4 inches; my upper arm, 12 3/4 inches; thigh, 22 inches. Please tell me my weak points, and also my strong points, if I have any, and what kind of training would be good for me. I can lift 412 pounds; is that good? I think you in advance.

E. H. J.

Massachusetts.

Your weak point is that you are altogether too heavy. You ought not to weigh more than 157 pounds at the outside, and that is allowing you some above what is regarded as the fair standard for an athlete. Your surplus fat is accompanied, of course, by a waist that takes 5 inches more of belt than it should require. You are good at the chest, barring an extra inch made by the adipose. Your good points are that despite your over-weight you have strong muscles and generally sound health, evidently. Get busy, and chase off a lot of weight. Do it by dieting and the right kind of exercise.

Prof. Fourmen: Will you please give your opinion of my measurements? Age, 20 years 6 months; weight, in street clothes, 170 pounds; height, stripped, 5 feet 10 inches; chest, normal, 30 inches; expanded, 41 1/2 inches; waist, 30 inches; biceps, left, natural, 10 3/4 inches; expanded, 11 3/4 inches; right, natural, 10 5/8 inches; expanded, 12 5/8 inches; forearm, right, 12 inches; left, 10 8/9 inches; my height, 5 feet 12 inches; wrists, 7 inches; thighs, 20 inches; ankles, 9 inches. My best standing broad jump is 9 feet 8 inches. I can lift 75-pound weight over my head with one hand ten times. A loyal Tip-Topper.

Trenton, N. J.

You are well built, and your proportions tally in nearly every respect with the ideal average for an all-round athlete. Your records show that you have done well. Splendid opportunities for athletic honors are yours.
EARLY NUMBERS OF THE
TIP TOP WEEKLY
ARE PRESERVED IN THE NEW MEDAL LIBRARY

The following books in the NEW MEDAL LIBRARY contain numbers 1 to 433 of the TIP TOP WEEKLY. Many of the individual numbers before 433 are entirely out of print so that the thousands of boys who are interested in the early adventures of Frank and Dick Merriwell and who want to read everything that was written about them, will welcome this opportunity to secure their favorite reading in a form that is more readily preserved. PRICE, FIFTEEN CENTS.

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527—Frank Merriwell's Trump Card.
530—Frank Merriwell's Strategy.
533—Frank Merriwell's Triumph.
535—Dick Merriwell's Grit.

Published About October 26th*

539—Dick Merriwell's Assurance.

Published About November 16th.

542—Dick Merriwell's Long Slide.

Published About December 7th.

545—Frank Merriwell's Rough Deal.

Published About December 28th.

548—Dick Merriwell's Threat.

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